

Class ~~Meetings~~:

EMBRACING THEIR

ORIGIN, NATURE, ~~OBLIGATION~~, AND BENEFITS.

ALSO,

THE DUTIES OF PREACHERS AND LEADERS, AND
APPEAL TO PRIVATE MEMBERS:

And their Temporal Advantages.

BY

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PREFACE.

WITH the clearest conviction that the institution of the Classes in the Methodist Episcopal Church originated in the special providence of God, and is founded substantially upon scriptural ground, and enters essentially into the Christian character and conduct of Methodists, the author has written the following Treatise in its defence—depending not upon his humble abilities for a satisfactory vindication, but upon the plain and immutable truths on which it rests, and the incalculable benefits with which its proper observance is connected. Regarding Methodism as a peculiar and prominent form of evangelical Christianity, and confident that it will endure and flourish so long as it maintains and observes its exalted views of the experimental and practical doctrines of the word of God, he has been greatly supported in the important work which he has undertaken. And believing that Methodism will flourish or decline in its spirituality and practical efficiency, in proportion as the Class Meeting is observed or neglected, he has the more earnestly

and anxiously addressed himself to the preparation of the following volume. That a better defence may be made, he cheerfully admits; but till this be done, his book may be of some use. In the former case, let his book be laid aside: in the latter case, he will have a sufficient reward.

It has been his aim to consider the subject in its essential nature and important relations to the entire Methodistic economy, spiritual and temporal; and yet he does not flatter himself that he has exhausted the subject. A subject so fruitful doubtless admits of other arguments, which an abler hand may furnish; and it will not be surprising if issues and objections shall be raised which have not been herein anticipated. The sources of information specially devoted to the subject are scanty and cursory, and consequently the principal arguments adduced in this work in support of the Class Meeting are the results of a careful elaboration of principles contained in the Bible, and lying at the foundation of every form of sound church-government. This is particularly the case in the discussion of the obligation of the Class Meeting as a test of membership in the Methodist Church, which may be considered by some as high and untenable ground, but which the author considers as the very essence of the institution, and which he has endeavored to establish upon an immovable basis.

If he has been too elaborate, and the arguments have been too much extended, in some parts of the work, for the comprehension of ordinary readers, the subject demanded it; and other and simpler arguments are furnished, the force of which will be obvious to the plainest understanding. These considerations will justify the size of the book.

If the author has unfortunately committed any material errors in this Treatise, he is consoled with the assurance that his brethren, who are jealous of the purity of Methodism, will quickly detect them, and he pledges himself as quickly to correct them. Confiding more in their vigilance and judgment than in his own abilities, and especially relying upon the superintendence of Him whose work Methodism is, the author commits this volume to the public—accompanying it, as he composed it, with his prayers and the purest motives.

L. R.

NORFOLK CITY, VA., Oct. 19, 1854.

INTRODUCTION.

THE love of change, in church and state, is a prominent characteristic of the present age. Before the minds of philosophers and statesmen there is ever floating the brilliant phantom of the world's regeneration—some golden age, in which they anticipate the perfection of political, intellectual, and moral glory, and the consummation of human happiness. Hence, neglect of the past, and contempt for the mighty dead, are too often and obstinately cherished. Historical facts are disregarded, as adapted alone to the age in which they occurred, and as of no use, and furnishing no lesson, no rules, no instructions, no warnings to the present. Venerable age, and sound experience, fraught with a vast fund of facts and ideas, are disdained ; and youth, inexperience, and theorizing leaders crowd our halls of legislature, civil and ecclesiastical, who want, they say, to correct the errors of the past, and regenerate the church and state. They insinuate that “the people stand in need of something which they have not at present”—some important changes and improvements ; but what they are they cannot exactly define, nor are they fully agreed among themselves as to what is required, nor have the people themselves generally any intelligible idea of what they are : indeed, they have not even expressed a sense of need of any material change at all. And yet, only let what they propose have the semblance of improvement, or a plausible approximation to it, and there are not found wanting men who, with rapturous enthusiasm, applaud and support them, and embrace that

which is *new*, as the very thing they want. Many are popular with the masses, because they have not fully revealed their secret, and because their theories have not yet been reduced to practice: this is the explanation of the unlimited influence of certain prominent individuals of great intellectual strength and force of will. Towering above the surrounding and admiring multitude, they sway them as they choose; because, having no principles of their own, and no confidence in themselves, and impelled onward by the charm of novelty, they arrange themselves under their leader's banner, which they support with devotion, till the unsuccessful and fatal experiment is made. It will not be surprising, then, unless God interpose, if civil revolutions, social convulsions, and ecclesiastical changes, rapidly follow the unfolding the dreams and theories of ambitious adventurers, and venerable and majestic structures, the work of ages, and founded upon sound and immutable principles, be assailed, if not subverted, by this indiscriminate passion for change.

The masses, we have said, under the influence of misguided and powerful leaders, are forever desirous of remodelling the present social order and organization of civil and religious society, by substituting other rulers for those now in power—by displacing established forms for new and untried ones—by repealing or materially modifying ancient and existing laws and usages for supposed improvements—by abolishing old and useful regulations and institutions, and thus severing the ligaments that, binding society together in unity and strength, maintain the mutual dependence of its individual members; in a word, by discarding the real for the ideal, the useful for the fanciful, the true for the plausible, and the practical for the speculative. Ignorant of the nature and slow development of sound principles—unacquainted with their true wants—failing to see that the real evil is *moral*, and *essentially in themselves*, they seek relief in outward, formal, and constitutional innovations; and so would

subject government, laws, and institutions to a rapid succession of useless, ineffectual, and, in many instances, disastrous changes. It is true, the old foundations of the social structure of Europe, civil and religious, in the last three centuries and a half, have been subverted by the successful application of the great moral and political truths which Christianity furnished to the people, and new laws, institutions, and forms of government have been adopted, and civilization and religion greatly advanced and improved. The speculations of the cloister that ended in the dreams of rapture, the superstitious reverence paid to imaginary relics of saint and seer, the imposing absurdities of clerical policy, the corrupt and enervating services of priestly ingenuity, the institutions and requisitions of spiritual despotism, and many long-established and degrading forms of civil tyranny, retired before the clear and animating light of Christianity, and most important, extensive, and useful changes followed. In the light of the Christian faith many profound problems, in church and state, received an easy solution: the duty, rights, and destiny of individuals and society, were more clearly recognised than ever; and where this faith, this central principle in the government of the world, is not known and applied, partially at least, no revolutions, however extensive, can accomplish any permanent good to society, though every throne upon earth fall, and every government be dissolved. The heedless, impetuous, and generous impulses of the masses, can accomplish no good, unless explained and guided by the light of the gospel; for in a corrupt age the masses become the easy and pliable instruments of ambitious men, who deceive them with the charming sounds of *liberty, legitimacy, reform, universal suffrage, improvement*, which, in the sense they apply them, experience soon proves to be but empty names, phantoms which never satisfy, and illusions that leave the world disappointed as in a thousand ages antecedent. Liberty, order,

government!—what are these? They are not character, they are not destiny: they are but means to develop and establish these: and we should beware, when we lay our hand to the work of innovation, lest we confound true liberty, good order, and good government, with the imperfections and wants of our nature which they are intended to relieve. It is not enough that we employ such attractive and plausible terms in our speeches and writings; we must also clearly show that the measures we propose are adequate to the desired ends.

Again: we talk of popular elements, the popular mind, the instincts of the masses, which some think they anticipate with prophetic exactness; but the masses are capable of recognising rather than of discovering great and practical truths. History does not furnish an example in which the instincts of the masses originated a single great truth that influenced the destinies of the human race: truths of this nature have always originated in the minds of gifted and thinking men, and when once proclaimed were recognised and embraced by the masses to whom they were proposed. Hence, every wise and honest man, in view of his own dignity and his relation to the interests of the church and the world, should be *calm*, and raise himself above the dreams of the masses, and so avert the natural results of the delusive and absurd schemes of instinct and ignorance. What we want, to guide the multitude in its primitive tendencies, is *character*, which, in its highest and best sense, so rarely exists in this day. What is character? It is firmness of will, connected practically with sound and fixed principles. The two must combine in the constitution of a pure and noble spirit. Sound principles without firmness of will are powerless; and firmness of will without sound principles is destructive. Besides, sound principles are immutable, and though unpopular in one age, they will become popular in another; and hence they should never be compromised, in

a single instance, to the whims and prejudices of an age, but be preserved and maintained firmly till they shall re-gerenate and reform succeeding times.

To apply these remarks: Shall the system of Methodism, which has been brought to its present noble state—so rational, so stable, so consistent, so holy, so useful to community, and such a blessing to mankind—a system which originated in, and has been preserved by, the special operations and effusions of the Holy Spirit, and the special interpositions of divine providence—be tampered with, or subjected to vague and doubtful experiments, as if it were a system of mere human policy and wisdom? In the emphatic language of Mr. Wesley, it is “a work of God;” and approved as it has been, and still is, of God, if we would ensure his continued blessing, we must pause long before we admit any fundamental change whatever. The system is in no embarrassment; it retains its original vigor and purity, and its inherent energies are unimpaired and unbroken: as strict as ever is it in its requisitions, as impartial in its application, and as ample in its privileges. It is not a revolution of the system in any essential particular we need, however we may admit certain circumstantial modifications; but a revolution in the practice both of the people and the preachers the system is designed so admirably to govern.

It is much easier with some persons to persuade themselves that the cause of declension, or the reason of slow progress, at any time, is a fault or defect in some part of the system, than in their own and a general deficiency in zeal, or piety, or consistency, or perseverance. They beguile their consciences by supposing that the system *does not work well*; and it gratifies their ambition to be esteemed as framers or promoters of new schemes and important amendments.

Let our tests be relaxed, and a greater latitude in opinion be allowed, and resistless will be the tendency of Methodism to dissolution. We want no new tests, nor any modifica-

tions of old ones, nor any new theories ; we need a rich and general effusion of divine grace—the power of God, and not the wisdom of man—the spirit of love, and not that of the world—a renewed dedication to God, and conformity to the doctrine and discipline of the Methodist Church ; and this will be all the material reform we require to preserve our purity, and insure the favor of God in all time. “The entire economy of Methodism, both as to its spiritual and temporal prosperity, may now be considered to have attained such a degree of maturity and perfection, as is not likely soon to admit of any material improvement.”*

Men who propose reform in fundamental matters should have great judgment and principle, a large preponderance of the deliberative faculties, reasoning closely, combining accurately, advancing cautiously, developing slowly every new conclusion, and balancing justly the interests of all concerned ; men possessing a comprehensive knowledge of the philosophy of Methodism in its origin, principles, laws, usages, designs, operations, and adaptations ; men who can discriminate between the errors and defects of administration, and the genius of the system—between errors in application and the true principles of the government—men who, with a clear and deep insight into human nature, and the circumstances and real wants of the times, understand the *science of adaptations*, which is the true philosophy of government in church and state. Such men not only fully understand the objects for which Methodism was originally established, but have a profound and jealous regard for all vital interests ; so that should they propose any new regulation for greater simplicity in preaching, or greater utility in administering the sacraments, or greater vigor in the whole administrative department, or greater amplitude of means in developing the inherent power of Methodism, it will stand forth so

* Dr. Warren's Digest, p. 18,—1827.

clearly and prominently before the world, that all shall see and embrace it at once as good and desirable, and answerable to the wants of the times. This is spiritual wisdom in the highest degree, and God, the founder and preserver of Methodism, when required, if it ever should be, will call forth the men, and qualify them for the work of reform or improvement. It is men of this class who are now at the helm of Methodism in England and America; and they propose no change or modification of the institution of the Class Meeting, but advocate it still in its original simplicity, and lament whenever they see it invaded, disparaged, or neglected; and hence we may infer, that no reform or modification is required on the subject by the times.

If reform were required in this essential particular, or in any other vital element of our government, the worst measure that could be adopted would be the incorporation of a popular political element, for this would be a political remedy to cure a spiritual evil, and into the final result must enter a proportionable degree of political spirit. Such a device would be a concentrated curse, that would infect the whole constitution of Methodism with a mortal disease, which the most splendid abilities could not subdue. Spiritual evils can be corrected only by spiritual remedies. It is a practical and heedless surrender of our purity and integrity, whenever, for decision and firmness in the maintainance of our principles, and moderation in our temper, we substitute principles and regulations political in their nature, and calculated only for political objects. Indeed, no schemes of worldly policy that may indirectly or incidentally advance Christianity (and Methodism is Christianity) should ever be allied to our church-government. The great primitive design of Methodism is—"to spread scriptural Christianity over the land,"* and over the world; and in its doctrines,

* Wesley's Works, vol. viii. p. 299, English ed.

in its spirit, in its influence, in its relation to other churches, and to our country and all other lands, and in its entire history, Methodism must *directly* pursue this great design, upon the immutable basis of the Scriptures—God's own pure word—from which alone must be derived the reason for any change or modification of our government which occasion, at any time, and any where, may clearly and necessarily require. This is true scriptural liberty, confined within its own proper limits—those of the Bible; and Methodism then, with a divine freedom and energy, goes forth upon its sublime mission, surviving every form of coeval change and convulsion in church and state, because exempt from every element of corruption and decay, and unfettered by bonds of a political or worldly nature.

But if men are dissatisfied with the vital principles and institutions of Methodism, they ought quietly to withdraw from the connection, and not remain to agitate those who are quiet, and endeavor to pull down or modify what it has cost so much to build up and complete. No one, preacher or private member, is bound to embrace the Methodistic form of Christianity; but having embraced it, it is his solemn duty to conform to it, jealously to guard it, and transmit it unimpaired to posterity, and not perpetually agitate the family with ideas and efforts of pretended improvements, which the people generally believe would be disastrous to themselves and their children. Common honesty demands that they neither inveigh against nor depreciate what they are pledged sacredly to observe and defend, or, if they cannot conscientiously conform any longer to the constitution and government of the Methodist church, that they quietly withdraw, and seek association elsewhere more congenial.

The principles of primitive Methodism we should ever keep before our minds; for, as time rolls on, and the channels through which they are transmitted are multiplied, they may gradually and insensibly undergo modifications,

and lose much of their former power and freshness. The novelty of the circumstances that accompanied their first development being past, and more than a century elapsed since they assumed the form of Methodism, we should grasp them with a firmer hand, and ever with a renovated ardor. And now that we live in an age animated by constant excitements, and in which life and strength are divided among multiplying objects of great interest, such as many benevolent associations and religious enterprises, each requiring a proportion of time, and thought, and support, it is the more necessary that we increase our vigilance over ourselves as Christians, and observe more faithfully the institutions of the church as Methodists. The great danger is, that with so many particular objects of absorbing interest before us, we will extend comparatively but a small share of attention to our strictly religious duties, and the time and attention that should be given most devoutly to the weekly services and peculiar institutions of the church, will be diverted to worldly matters and inferior duties. The great danger is, that we will sacrifice the former to the latter, at least so far as to confine our religious duties wholly to the Sabbath, and devote the rest of the week wholly to the multiplying objects of this stirring and impetuous age.

It requires great wisdom and resolution to pursue with safety this path of danger. When interests so exciting and diverse, yet not conflicting, demand our constant care, what but divine wisdom can direct us where properly to draw the dividing line, and what less than divine resolution can enable us to give each their due proportion of attention? What less than immortal energy and skill can hold these interests in harmony and equilibrium? Who, without a holy fortitude and firmness, can so superintend and enjoy the great blessings and institutions of national morality, as at the same time to preserve and maintain the greater blessings and institutions of piety, and guard them perfectly in

their original simplicity and purity? As the former hold the relation of effects and causes to the latter, the latter cannot be neglected without necessarily impairing the value and efficiency of the former; and the process may be so gradual and insensible, that shortly nearly the whole energy of the church may be concentrated in the support of the societies and enterprises of national morality, and the services of the church degenerate into a splendid and imposing formality. The only safe guard against this apprehended result is the exercise of an undiminished zeal in discharging religious duties in *every particular*, and observing, punctually, promptly, and regularly, the institutions of the church in *every department*.

As riches, intelligence, and influence increase, temptations to pride, independence, and worldliness also increase; and hence there is the greater necessity that the church increase proportionably in spirituality, though the opposite has generally been the result. In poverty, trial, and persecution the church has always flourished the most, because then it depended exclusively upon God for prosperity. The circumstantial glory of the church can never be confounded with its spiritual, without a rapid declension, and its ultimate subversion, and God will reconstruct it in its original purity and majesty through the instrumentality of new agents and new circumstances—agents who become the leaders in re-formations—and circumstances that form the events of the times. The circumstantial greatness of our church is, indeed, an occasion of profound gratitude to God, and a means of astonishing influence in advancing his kingdom among men; but it is also an occasion of appalling danger to its inherent, substantial, and spiritual character, which is its only true glory, and which can be preserved only by the faithful discharge of all its spiritual duties, and the spiritual observance of all its wise and peculiar regulations. Here I take my stand, and with prophetic certainty can anticipate

its advancing glory with the lapse of revolving ages, and catch its distant shout of holy triumph on the completion of its work at the end of time. Divest it, however, of its pure spiritual character, and it is destined to fall and mingle with the promiscuous and venerable ruins of worldly wisdom and ambition. Nor can I, without dismay, see any one of its fundamental regulations, substantially evangelical in their nature, gradually becoming obsolete by habitual neglect—regulations originated in its incipiency, effective and renovating in its progress, and that, under the blessing of God, now constitute us what we are among the churches of Christendom.

Let us preserve with devotion every thing in Methodism truly and essentially Wesleyan, because, in the great *inner facts*, *the heart* of the gospel, Methodism has found her true resting place. Let us never leave the old beaten paths, however others may abandon and endeavor to despoil them—others who, under the pretence of remodelling, would disorganize; who, in the vain hope of recalling the church to her duty, would lead her farther from her appropriate work and field of labor. If we believe every thing essentially and substantially Methodistic to be essentially and substantially evangelical, then there is no more necessity for change or abandonment here than there is in the gospel, and abandonment or change would be as unwise in the one as in the other; in a word, if we believe Methodism to be substantially the gospel, then it should be held as immutable as we hold the gospel, and as united essentially with the enterprises, the duration, and the destiny of the gospel. The Methodist church, then, *as it is*, is in no jeopardy. Let it never be removed from the eternal foundation on which it reposes, and on which it has reposed securely so long. That it has flourished with accumulating strength so long now, amid so much opposition from without, and resisted and recovered from so many and heavy shocks within

her bosom, and acquired so much spiritual power in so short a time, are convincing evidences of the wisdom and strength of her constitution. Let us ascribe our wonderful successes, under the blessing of God, to a faithful and practical adherence to the evangelical, and consequently unchangeable, nature of our doctrines and institutions; and let us attribute any and every failure of the past to departure from these, or neglect of these, and be assured, that failures will follow, in number and consequence, as we depart from or neglect primordial Methodism. The truth of the gospel is the primordial substance of Methodism; and may its concentrated influence be felt in every extremity of the system! The destitution of wisdom, or of ability, or of moral principle, such as is characteristic of ambitious and corrupt men, may impede the progress of Methodism, or embarrass its process in development, but this is no proof of defect in the system; it is rather an incapacity to apply the system, which we must be vigilant to detect and prompt to correct. What is the principle of a system? It is its truth, its operative cause, its ground of action, its universal and unchangeable power, its whole and indestructible vitality, producing the same results substantially under all circumstances and in all ages. This is the gospel—this is Methodism. Appendages, circumstances, are not the principle: they give full development to the principle in producing its legitimate results. Christian communion is a principle of Methodism, and the Class Meeting is but a form or mode of developing it—an appendage that leads it out to its legitimate results. As good a mode or appendage has never yet been devised by the wisdom of man, much less a better; and let all modern theorists and opposers of the present form, and those who are its friends, and yet are doubtful of its suitableness to the present state of the church, and even those who conform to it simply for conscience' sake, beware, lest, in substituting what they may re-

gard as a wiser and more suitable form, they abandon or sacrifice the *substance*, and thus divest Methodism of one of the essential principles of the gospel ; lest, at least, they embarrass and render doubtful the development of Christian communion, which, under its present form, is easy, natural, and sure ; lest they substitute means and measures which are complicated and counteractive for those which are simple and productive of the legitimate result ; lest, instead of removing a supposed evil, they introduce and establish a real one. As it is the fixed and unchangeable principle of fire to burn all combustible materials with which it comes in contact, unless the circumstances of contact be unfavorable, so we should associate the principle of Christian communion with no modes or appendages that would diminish its full intensity of spiritual blessing, or prevent its full development of spiritual comfort and utility. Here we should be cautious, firm, and confident, and not precipitate, inconsistent, and doubtful, or what we seize as an improvement, and which may indeed prove to be a temporary good, will eventually turn out to be a real evil, and have its day and die. How few men can think and plan for others without danger to themselves and the future ! Whatever changes in the modal or circumstantial system of Methodism may really be needed for the improvement and elevation of Methodism, we deny that any such necessity extends to the Class Meeting : the best that the church can do is to reap all its inestimable advantages by a speedy revival, and a faithful, universal, and perpetual observance of it. Let the church expend its time and energies in this direction, and have done with the dreams and novelties of supposed improvement in this efficient and established institution. Set the mighty system of Class Meetings in universal operation, and keep it in operation, and it is impossible to tell where its influence will not be felt. It will then give almighty life and power to Methodism in all its elements and enter-

prises, and furnish the church with new and adequate resources for new and more enlarged measures for the evangelization of the world. The deep pulsations of the great heart of Methodism will be felt to its farthest limits, and be prolonged till they reach the ends of the earth. As a truth once developed and established can never be lost, though it may be suspended or remain stationary for a time, so the efficiency of Class Meetings, once tested and established, remains the same, though suspended, and when revived, will exert all its original and legitimate power. And hence, we cannot conceive what changes or new states of society, or what advancements in civilization, or what alterations and improvements in civil governments, or what expansion and elevation of the human mind, or what new forms of conventional life, or what achievements of the blessed gospel itself, can require any material alterations or amendment of the Class Meeting system, much less its abandonment altogether. Indeed, we believe, as Methodism is a form of Christianity that is prominently efficient in advancing man in these respects, the annihilation of, or a material alteration in, the present system of Class Meetings, which is one of the principal internal sources of the efficiency of Methodism, would retard the progress of the world in these great matters. Methodistic truth, which is but another name for the omnipotent gospel, if it be allowed full play, is capable of co-operating powerfully with other evangelical churches in bursting every bond, and bolt, and bar, and chain, though made of iron, and of surmounting every obstacle, however formidable, civil or ecclesiastical, that have held mankind so long in bondage and in ignorance. Let us never abandon one of its principal instruments, that has answered this object so well and so long, till another is proposed in its stead that is really preferable. As the world is to be taken as it is, this seems intrinsically to answer the utmost want and wish of the present age, and we

should zealously and courageously support it; and the world too, in time, will become its fast friend and grateful supporter.

The church is the world's reformer, because it is the guardian and publisher of the only great moral truth or principle that is to regenerate the realms and races of men; the only organization that contains the central fire that is to transfuse life throughout the cold, dead mass of humanity; the only association of truth-governed men that holds aloft the light of sufficient brightness to disperse the thick darkness that has enveloped the world for sixty centuries; the only herald that is to echo and re-echo the proclamation of the angels, "which shall be glad tidings of great joy to all men;" the only agent that is to subdue the clamorous uproar of a thousand ages, and which a thousand trials have failed to do, and are still failing to do, and will ever fail to do; the only class of men gone forth to scatter the seeds of life over the wide desert earth, till it "bloom and blossom as the rose" in all its amplitude; the only army marshalled, and on the march, under heaven's own colors and command, and ever advancing, though sometimes slowly, yet never retreating, and always surely, from "conquering to conquer," till "the kingdoms of this world shall all become the kingdoms of our Lord Jesus Christ;" the only agent that, with the stillness of the lightning's speed, is to telegraph the knowledge of the love and will of God along the interlacing, countless, and endless wires of Providence, down to the end of the prolonged series of future generations. O, could we stand upon an observatory high as heaven, which angels occupy, and look back and forward in the world's history, what a sublime consummation of the deep-laid and connected plans of God, through the instrumentality of his church, would be spread before our vision!

The church is not bewildered, as once it was, in darkness, calling out, as in other days, "Watchman, what of the

night?" If doubt exist at all, it is where, and what, and how stupendous, will be her next achievements in the emancipation and evangelization of the human race. In this age, every form of church and civil government in the civilized world is undergoing an ordeal of fierce flame, and what is not substantially evangelical most surely must be subverted. Men are striving to get down through the superincumbent rubbish of ages to fundamental principles, and to build upon immutable foundations. The whole past has been summoned before the present, and by the present is being subjected to a thorough investigation, and the Bible, the book of God and of time, is made a standard of investigation and improvement.

A characteristic of the present age, obvious on every hand to thinking men, is the rapid tendency of the churches generally to formalism. Carried away by the feverish and countless excitements of the times, the prevailing sects of the day are reposing quietly and coldly upon their respective systems, as safeguards established by experiment and age. It may be truly said of every evangelical sect—our own not excepted—that it is destitute of many of the characteristics of the same people in primitive times. They are all the same in name, and it may be in fundamental principles, now, they were in the beginning; but which of them has preserved its original simplicity, or former devotion, or early spirit of self-denial, or primitive boldness in rebuking sin, or compassion and zeal in seeking to save sinners, or tenderness and love toward each other, or heavenly-mindedness in conversation and conduct? These were the bright and strong rays of the glory so conspicuous in the early history of the evangelical churches; but now each seems to emulate the other in pointing to its numbers, intelligence, wealth, worldly resources, and worldly influence, as indications of its prosperity. But a sufficient refutation of this mode of determining the true prosperity of a church is, that the

church of Rome, in these respects, overtops every other church in Christendom, and it is undeniable that no church in Christendom is as scrupulously and strictly formal and corrupt as she is. And yet the evangelical churches are not past recovering. The fathers in Israel, anxious to check and remove the evil of formalism, are recalling the children to the old landmarks, and to the former firm positions of their founders; retaining all of real excellence and improvement unknown and inaccessible to the founders—that the simplicity, humility, zeal, moral beauty, dignity, and efficiency of each sect, may be heightened in proportion to the urgency and exigency of the times, and the expanding importance of revolving years. The principles of primitive Methodism are “fixed facts,” and invariably productive of the same results. One of these is the substantial efficiency of the Class Meeting. Let the universal cry be heard for its revival.

Another characteristic of the present age—and the same is true of the ministry generally of our own church—is a shrinking from responsibility to discharge official duties in the administration of discipline, and in carrying out into practical application those principles and doctrines of creed and government on which our church was founded, and on which it must ever depend for permanency and success. This timidity is ascribable, in a great degree, to the want of moral courage; that is, ministerial duties have been neglected so long and to such an extent by our immediate predecessors and ourselves, that few among us can be found who are courageous enough to meet the existing difficulties face to face and heart to heart, though we all perceive them, and lament their growing power. It is not surprising, then, that the doctrines of expediency should be so often substituted for the claims of fundamental principles, which, in their legitimate application, might, it is true, subject the church to a loss of numbers and worldly influence, and the

ministry to much temporary trouble and inconvenience. Nor is it surprising that we should so often seek to conform our administrations to the maxims and regulations of conventional society, which fall infinitely short of the great objects of church-government, rather than to the laws of God, which are the only appropriate ground-work of church-government. If God reign not supreme in civil governments and conventional society, he should in the church, which is his own kingdom. If civil rulers enforce not practically (and they never will till the world is regenerated) the principles of the gospel, the ministry of the church should do it, or the moral government of the world will be gradually weakened, and soon be destroyed. We have not only a standard of duty, clear as sunshine, in the gospel, but a noble example of courage and faithfulness in the fathers and founders of our system. It is one thing, in a corrupt age, as in that of Luther, or of Wesley, to revive the pure principles of the gospel, and originate a church-government answerable to the wants of the times, and quite another to maintain those principles, and sustain and improve that government as may be required from age to age. It may not require as great abilities in the latter as in the former case, but the same courage and fealty are required in the one as in the other: in the former, in resisting and correcting existing evils, and in the latter, in opposing and anticipating abuses and new forms of evil that spontaneously spring forth from the moral depravity of every succeeding age of the world. We do not assume that our fathers were in advance of us in the knowledge of the means of the world's regeneration; but we do maintain, that we are far behind them in the simple piety and dauntless courage which they possessed, and which are required to impel the world with the greatest momentum possible onward to its final elevation and perfection. Nor do we assume that the world has retrograded from what it was made in their

day. No, but we do maintain that it is not what it might have been, and should now be, and that this is so because we have failed, and still fail, to cultivate as sedulously, and practise as faithfully, the moral attributes which they cultivated and practised. They were men of invincible moral courage—we should be so : they were men of earnestness and indomitable zeal—we should be so : they were men of the most strenuous efforts and perseverance—we should be so : they were men of the purest sincerity and simplest piety—we should be so : they were men of inflexible firmness and consistency—we should be so : they were men of gravity and soberness, because with the ideas of the great and good works before them, inwrought and abiding in their very souls, they could not indulge in the least undue levity of manner—we should be so : they were men of the purest and severest self-denial, that they might concentrate their whole energies upon the work of God and the salvation of man—we should be so : they were men of one work, and but one, and that an incessant one, a lifetime one, to arouse and direct the world to God, and keep it in life and motion—we should be so. Such as they were, we should be, and more, because with what they have placed in our hands, we can, under the blessing of the same God that blessed them, do more for the world's redemption than they did. Let us not think and act as if the future were a blank to us, and so transfer the great events to others, but as crowded with unparalleled moral grandeur and importance, and as depending upon us, in our ministerial sphere, for development. Let us not suppose, that our work is not intimately and essentially connected with the whole future; but, undaunted by any appearances that may be foreboding, develop the residue of latent energy in the gospel committed to our hands, and instil its simple and mighty truths into the hearts of the people, inspired the most by the certain connection of our labors with the remotest and brightest period of the world's

history, and by the belief that across time's stormy ocean we are guiding man to that new world for which he has been in search in vain so long. Let us not tremble at the blackened political heavens above us, and the waves of political chaos and confusion that roll high and heavily around us, for there will be no rest to the world till the Pilot of the Tiberian sea says, "Peace be still," and he is in the ship with us. There are breaks in the clouds, and bright spots on the waters, and the landing may not be afar. We occupy the ranks from which our fathers have retired, and the banner of the great Captain of our salvation still waves over us, and soon we must retire to give place to a new generation of saints; but the victory is not doubtful: we shall have scarcely finished our campaign, and retired from the battle-field, before new shouts of triumph shall go up from earth to heaven, and the final battle and the final victory may be close at hand. Methodism contains within it substantially all the elements required for the full play of man's entire being in his highest and last development in this life; and let her never listen to any modification of her circumstantial nature that does not clearly and intimately concern, either directly or remotely, the highest spiritual interests of the whole human race.

Our ecclesiastical government, in all its fundamental regulations, is constituted sufficiently broad and deep for the development of the whole experimental and practical power of the gospel; containing the same requisitions that are made in the Bible, and invested with all that is required to accomplish the great work of the Church of God. In these respects, we repeat, Methodism needs no improvement. Stand here—stand firmly. If there is spiritual declension in the church anywhere and to any extent, stand by the good old constitution—change not that in any essential particular, which is now in harmony with the gospel, and is all we want as a guide and rule. Follow the guide—mind the

rule. If one must go down, let it be the corrupt part of the church, not the constitution. If one must suffer, let it be the delinquent and disobedient, not our wholesome and immutable laws. If we decline, let it be in numbers, not in graces, nor in our regard for the principles of truth. If change must come for the worst, let it be in the worldly portion of the church, and not in the spirituality, purity, and wisdom of our constitution. Let us dwindle almost to disappearance from the earth, if it must be, like the church in the ark, or the "*seven thousand*" among the mountains of rebellious Israel, or the "*few names* in Sardis, whose garments were unspotted," rather than change our constitution, and fill the world with the glory of a worldly greatness, and load the atmosphere with moral death. Let but a few, if no more, stand by the old ship, with its anchor clinched in the eternal rocks, and the time of revival and enlargement shall come, and "*the glory of the latter house shall be greater than that of the former*," and it will be infinitely better then, to have the same old constitution to greet and bless the church, as it has blessed us, than to subject a regenerated posterity to the painful necessity of restoring what we had taken away, of removing what we had added, and of repairing what we had mutilated. An entirely spiritual church would be satisfied with our present form of church-government: then let us be such, and we shall be satisfied with it. Let us be crucified to the world in all its forms. Let us moderate our passion for fine churches, splendid pulpit abilities and accomplishments, innovations on the services of public worship, and modifications in the existing means of grace. Let us beware of the charm of popular favor, and check our solicitude for popular opinion. By simplicity, by purity, by humility, by self-denial, by zeal, by faith and good works, by entire conformity to the gospel, let us rather seek to render popular favor and popular opinion subservient to the glory of God.

The state has in it no principle that remotely subserves *spiritual* ends that we do not already possess, and which it has not borrowed from the church : and hence any modification or addition, in church matters, upon *civil* principles, cannot promote the spirituality of the church. All we need, we repeat, is a *spiritual* revival in the ministry and membership : a conformity to our spiritual rules and regulations already adopted and in force. If we cannot obtain this revival and conformity, then we shall raise our voice for the *execution* of our laws, by which existing evils may be corrected, and our church purified and prepared for the forthcoming events of the stupendous future, rather than for the adoption of a system that, while it cannot correct existing evils, must add greatly to them, and so accelerate the time of the downfall of our church.

Finally : there are two modes of refuting a false opinion. First, to confront and compare it with truth ; and, secondly, to consider it by itself, and see whether it is consistent throughout. If fundamental principles are false, the most logical minds must fall into many contradictions and absurdities, and in examining their arguments, we are compelled to acknowledge the justness of their conclusions, or we must reject their premises altogether. But if fundamental principles are true, no refinement or force of sophistry can refute the conclusions deduced from them : and such are the great principles, as we shall now see, on which the institution of the Classes in our church is firmly and immovably founded : principles *universally* recognised and admitted as true by those acquainted with the Bible and the spiritual nature of the Christian church.

PART I.

Origin and Nature of Class Meetings.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF CLASS MEETINGS.

METHODISM, in its doctrinal and experimental nature, is the revival of primitive and evangelical Christianity. The institution of the class meeting, it is true, was incidental, and as such, it is peculiarly an institution of Methodism, but in its substantial nature, it is evangelical and divine. Circumstantially it is the offspring of divine Providence, but substantially it contains inherently the spirit, essence, and efficiency of the gospel. So long as it retains these, it can no more be neglected or suspended by Methodists without serious consequences to personal and practical piety, the dignity and influence of the church, and the spiritual and temporal welfare of mankind, than the gospel can be. As it originated in the Wesleyan revival of pure and spiritual Christianity, so it will wane with the decline, in any degree, of the purity and simplicity of original Methodism. It may be confidently affirmed, that wherever, and in proportion as interest in the class meeting has waned, there the experimental power of Methodism has waned, and the converse is also true. The history of this institution of our church, therefore, is not a matter of ordinary importance, but of vital concern to Methodists, as it will elucidate the nature and benefits of the institution, as well as enable us to refute the many groundless objections of its opposers, and

strengthen the confidence of those who have given it but a partial consideration and occasional observance.

I. The very essence of the social institution of the class meeting seems to have been elemental in Methodism in its earliest incipiency, though then it was not called by that name, nor even thought of as such. From the commencement of Methodism it has existed in nature at least; indeed, Methodism originated in the *class-room*. "In November, 1729, four young gentlemen of Oxford—Mr. John Wesley, fellow of Lincoln College; Mr. Charles Wesley, student of Christ's Church; Mr. Morgan, commoner of Christ Church, and Mr. Kirkham, of Merton College—began to spend some evenings in the week together, in reading, chiefly, the Greek Testament. The next year, two or three of Mr. John Wesley's pupils desired the liberty of meeting with them; and afterward one of Mr. Charles Wesley's pupils. It was in 1732, that Mr. Ingham, of Queen's College, and Mr. Broughton, of Exeter, were added to their number. To these, in April, was joined Mr. Clayton, of Brazennose, with two or three of his pupils. About the same time, Mr. James Hervey was permitted to meet with them, and in 1735, Mr. Whitefield. They were all zealous members of the Church of England; not only tenacious of all her doctrines, so far as they knew them, but of all her discipline, to the minutest circumstance. They were likewise zealous observers of all the University statutes, and that for conscience' sake. But they observed neither these, nor any thing else further than they conceived it was bound upon them by their one book, the Bible; *it being their one desire and design to be downright Bible Christians; taking the Bible, as interpreted by the primitive church and our own, for their WHOLE AND SOLE RULE.* The one charge then advanced against them was, that they were 'righteous overmuch,' that they were abundantly too scrupulous, and too strict, carrying things to great extremes; that they took the

*Scriptures in too strict and literal a sense; SO THAT IF THEY WERE RIGHT, FEW INDEED WOULD BE SAVED.”**
“Some young men at Oxford united themselves together, in 1729, for the purpose of strengthening each other’s pious resolutions, and observing the religious services with strictness. They aimed particularly at the more rigid compliance with the precepts of the New Testament than was usual in the church, and devoted themselves to the works of love,” &c.† This was in 1729. “In October, 1735, Mr. John and Charles Wesley, and Mr. Ingham, left England with a design to go and preach to the Indians in Georgia,”‡ and after their arrival, when they reached Savannah, not finding, as yet, any door open for pursuing their main design, they considered in what manner they might be most useful to the little flock at Savannah. And they agreed, “1. To advise the more serious among them to form themselves into a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week, in order to reprove, instruct, and exhort one another. 2. To select out of those a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other, which might be forwarded, partly by our conversing singly with each other, and partly by inviting them all together to our house; and this, accordingly, we determined to do every Sunday in the afternoon.”§ Here we have the Methodist church, in its origin, instituting, and observing, *weekly*, the very means of grace that subsequently assumed a more formal nature, and became a prominent characteristic of her organization.|| The same measure Mr. Wesley adopted soon

* Wesley’s Works, vol. v. p. 246.

† Encyclopedia Amer., vol. viii. p. 442.

‡ Wesley’s Works, vol. v. p. 247.

§ Wesley’s Works, vol. iii. pp. 33, 34.

|| “Here we see,” says Dr. Whitefield, “the first rudiments of the future economy of classes and bands, which has had no small influence in promoting the success of the Methodists beyond any other denomination of Christians, not immediately favored by the civil power.” Life of Wesley, vol. ii. p. 15.

after at Frederica. June, "Thursday, 10, (1736.) We began to execute at Frederica what we had before agreed to do at Savannah. Our design was, on Sundays, in the afternoon, and every evening, *after public service*, to spend some time with the most serious of the communicants *in singing, reading, and conversation*. This evening we had only *Mark Hird*. But on Sunday, Mr. Hird and two more desired to be admitted. After a psalm and a little conversation, I read Mr. Law's 'Christian Perfection,' and concluded with another psalm."* And so Mr. Wesley led class, in fact, after public service, though the first time in Frederica he had but *one*, and the next time but *three*, present—a capital example for Methodist preachers throughout the bounds of Methodism. Soon after he formed another class: "Wednesday, 16, (June), another little company of us met: Mr. Reed, Davidson, Walker, Delamotte, and myself. We sung, read a little of Mr. Law, and then conversed. Wednesdays and Fridays were the days we fixed for constant meeting."† *Twice a week*—and yet many of us think *once a week* too often, and do not even attend that often, and very many not at all. The method above, Mr. Wesley generally observed in Savannah. Writing by Mr. Ingham to his friends in England, he observes: "Some time after the evening service, as many of my parishioners as desire it, meet at my house, (as they do also on Wednesday evening,) and *spend about an hour in prayer, singing, and mutual exhortation*. A smaller number (most of those who design to communicate the next day) meet here on Saturday evening; and a few of these come to me on the other evenings, and pass half an hour in the same employment."‡

On his return to England, Mr. Wesley revived this form of the class meeting, which, it seems, had been discontinued

* Wesley's Works, vol. iii. p. 25.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 26.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 34.

in his absence in America. "This evening (May 1, 1738,) our little society began, which afterward met in Fetter Lane. Our fundamental rules were as follows:

"In obedience to the command of God by St. James, and by the advice of Peter Böhler, it is agreed by us,

"1. That we will meet together once a week to 'confess our faults one to another, and pray one for another, that we may be healed.'

"2. That the persons so meeting be divided into several *bands or little companies*, none of them consisting of fewer than five, or more than ten persons.

"3. That every one, in order, speak as freely, plainly, and concisely as he can, the real state of his heart, with his several temptations and deliverances, since the last time of meeting.

"4. That all the bands have a conference at eight, every Wednesday evening, begun and ended with singing and prayer.

"5. That any who desire to be admitted into this society be asked, 'What are your reasons for desiring this? Will you be entirely open, using no kind of reserve? Have you any objections to any of our orders?' (which may then be read.)

"6. That, when any new member is proposed, every one present speak clearly and freely whatever objection he has to him.

"7. That those against whom no reasonable objection appears, be, in order for their trial, formed into one or more distinct bands, *and some person agreed on to assist them*.

"8. That after *two months'* trial, if no objection then appear, they may be admitted into the society.

"9. That every fourth Saturday be observed as a day of general intercession.

"10. That on the Sunday seven-night following be a general *love-feast*, from seven till ten in the evening.

"11. That no particular member be allowed to act in any thing contrary to any order of the society : and that if any persons, after being thrice admonished, do not conform thereto, they be not any longer esteemed as members"*

Among these rules, especially the 1st and 3d, we recognise the very substance of the class meeting.

Mr. Wesley formed societies wherever and whenever he could : " *Wednesday, 4 (April, 1739.)* At Baptist Mills, (a sort of a suburb or village about half a mile from Bristol,) I offered the grace of God to about fifteen hundred persons, from these words : ' I will heal their backsliding ; I will love them freely.' In the evening, three women agreed to meet together weekly, with the same intention as those at London, viz. ' To confess their faults one to another, and pray one for another, that they may be healed.' At eight, four young men agreed to meet, in pursuance of the same design."†

II. The origin of classes, in the proper sense of the term, as it is now understood and applied by the Methodists, was providential, and the following is the historical account of it. Mr. Wesley briefly refers to it first in his Journal : " *Monday, (February 15, 1742.)* Many (in Bristol) met together to consult on a proper method for discharging the public debt ; and it was at length agreed, 1. That every member of the society, who was able, should contribute a penny a week. 2. That the whole society should be divided into little companies or classes—about twelve in each class. And, 3. That one person in each class should receive the contribution of the rest, and bring it into the stewards weekly."‡ Mr. Wesley having, at this time, no idea that the institution of class-meeting would grow out of this temporal plan, makes but a brief and general reference to the occasion ; but, subsequently, when Methodism ex-

* Wesley's Works, vol. iii. p. 66, 67. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 127. ‡ Ibid. p. 242.

tended widely in England, and the labor of watching over the societies was too great for him, providence suggested to him a plan suitable to the *itinerant* nature of his ministry, and of this he gives a particular and detailed statement in his "Plain Account of the People called Methodists"—a part of which we here transcribe: "But as much as we endeavored to watch over each other, we soon found some who did not love the gospel. I do not know that any hypocrites crept in; for, indeed, there was no temptation: but several grew cold, and gave way to the sins that had long easily beset them. We quickly perceived there were many ill consequences of suffering these to remain among us. It was dangerous to others; inasmuch as all sin is of an infectious nature. It brought such a scandal on their brethren as exposed them to what was not properly the reproach of Christ. It laid a stumbling-block in the way of others, and caused the truth to be evil spoken of. We groaned under these inconveniences long, before a remedy could be found. The people were scattered so wide in all parts of the town, from Wapping to Westminster, *that I could not easily see what the behavior of each person in his own neighborhood was*: so that several disorderly walkers did much hurt *before* I was apprized of it. At length, while we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method, for which we have cause to bless God ever since. I was talking with several of the society in Bristol, concerning the means of paying the debts there, when one* stood up, and said, 'Let every member of the society give a penny a week, till all are paid.' Another answered, 'But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it.' 'Then,' said he, 'put eleven of the poorest with me; and if they give any thing, well: I will call on them weekly; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for

* Captain Foy. Wesley's Works, vol. vii. p. 316.

myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbors weekly; receive what they give, and make up what is wanting.' It was done. In a while, some of these informed me, they found such and such a one did not live as he ought. It struck me immediately, '*This is the thing, THE VERY THING, we have wanted so long.*' I called together all the leaders of the classes, (so we used to term them and their companies,) and desired, that each would make a particular inquiry into the behavior of those he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence. As soon as possible, the same method was used in London, and all other places.* Evil men were detected and reproved. They were borne with for a season. If they forsook their sins, we received them gladly; if they obstinately persisted therein, it was openly declared that they were not of us. The rest mourned and prayed for them, and yet rejoiced that, as far as in us lay, the scandal was rolled away from the society."†

Mr. Wesley adds: "At first they (the leaders) visited each person at his own house; but this was soon found not so expedient. And that on many accounts: (1.) It took up more time than most of the leaders had to spare. (2.) Many persons lived with masters, mistresses, or relations, who would not suffer them to be thus visited. (3.) At the houses of those who were not so averse, they often had no opportunity of speaking to them but in company; and this did not at all answer the end proposed, of exhorting, comforting, or reproofing. (4.) It frequently happened, that one affirmed what another denied. And this could not be

* "Whether in Europe or America?"—Wesley's Works, vol. vii. p. 316.

† Wesley's Works, vol. v. pp. 178, 179.

cleared up without seeing them together. (5.) Little misunderstandings and quarrels of various kinds frequently arose among relations or neighbors; effectually to remove which, it was needful to see them all face to face. Upon all these considerations, it was agreed that those of each class should meet all together. And by this means, a more full inquiry was made into the behaviour of every person. Those who could not be visited at home, or no otherwise than in company, had the same advantage with others. Advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed: and, after an hour or two spent in this labor of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving.”*

On this subject, Mr. Watson observes: “In the discipline of Methodism, the division of the society into classes is an important branch. Each class is placed under a person of experience and piety, who meets the others once a week, for prayer, and inquiry into the religious state of each, in order to administer exhortation and counsel. The origin of these classes was, however, purely accidental. The chapel at Bristol was in debt; and it was agreed that each member of the society should contribute one penny a week to reduce the burden. The Bristol Society was, therefore, divided into classes; and, for convenience, one person was appointed to collect the weekly subscriptions from each class, and to pay the amount to the stewards. The advantage of this system, when turned to a higher purpose, at once struck the methodical and practical mind of Mr. Wesley; he, therefore, invited several “earnest and sensible men” to meet him; and the society in London was divided into classes like that in Bristol, and placed under the spiritual care of these tried and experienced persons. At first they visited each person, at his own residence, once a week; but

* Wesley’s Works, vol. v. pp. 179, 180.

the preferable mode of bringing each class together weekly was at length adopted.”* Respecting the division of the Society in London into classes, Mr. Wesley observes: “*March, Thursday, 25, (1742.)* I appointed several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found of knowing the people who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed there could be no better way to come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person, than to divide them into classes, like those at Bristol, under the inspection of those in whom I could most confide. This was the origin of our classes at London, for which I can never sufficiently praise God; the unspeakable usefulness of the institution having ever since been more and more manifest.”†

Let the reader carefully bear in mind this history of the origin of class meetings, that he may more clearly understand their nature, obligation, and benefits—especially that he may see the full force of the arguments we shall adduce in support of their obligation as a test of membership in our church. Doubtless, their material relation to an *itinerant* ministry has already been forcibly suggested to his mind, and this relation will appear the more forcibly in the progress of this work. The brief history we have given is sufficient for the purposes of this treatise.

* Watson’s Life of Wesley, p. 96. † Wesley’s Works, vol. iii. p. 246.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE OF CLASS MEETINGS.

1. THERE is nothing new in the principle on which the class-meeting system is founded, though the Methodists invest the system with more importance than other churches have done. The system grows out of the nature of things. It is a means adopted to regulate, perpetuate, and promote the results of an evangelical reformation, by associating the converts in the closest Christian fellowship and co-operation, by separating the church as effectually as possible from the world, and by bringing the church more immediately under the pastoral oversight of the preachers. Mr. Wesley, from the beginning, proceeded upon these considerations.

Mutual communion was prevalent among the English parochial clergy, before the act of uniformity, and the following is an example: "Christians must drive an open and a free trade; they must teach one another the mysteries of godliness. Tell your experience; and tell your conflicts; and tell your comforts. As iron sharpeneth iron, as rubbing of the hands maketh both warm, and as live coals maketh the rest to burn, so let the fruit of society be mutually sharpening, warming, and influencing. Christians should also bewail their failings, infirmities, deadness, coldness, narrowness, and unprofitableness, one to another; to see whether others have been in the same state; what course they took; and what remedy they procured. Many souls may perish through too much modesty and reserve. In the prophets' time, when proud scorers talked vainly,

and did what they list, then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. No doubt, they spake of God; of his counsels, and of his works and ways; of his providence and goodness, and of the baseness of atheistical thoughts. Would Christians thus meet, and exchange words and notions, they might build up one another; they might heat and inflame one another; and they might strengthen and encourage one another, as the brethren did St. Paul. And have we not *express* command for this duty of conference? 'Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbor, What hath the Lord answered? and, What hath he spoken?'"* (Jer. xxiii. 35.)

Baxter, in his stirring and powerful work, "The Reformed Pastor," issued in 1655, maintains substantially the same ground. "The first and chief point," says he, "which I have to propose to you, is this, Whether it be not the unquestionable duty of the generality of ministers throughout the country to set themselves presently to the work of instructing, individually, all that are committed to their care, who will be persuaded to submit thereto? That people must be taught the principles of religion and matters of greatest necessity to salvation, is past doubt among us. That they must be taught it in the most edifying, advantageous way, I hope we are agreed. That personal conference, and examination, and instruction have many excellent advantages for their good, is no less beyond dispute. That personal instruction is recommended to us by Scripture, and by the practice of the servants of Christ, and approved by the godly of all ages, is, so far as I can find, without contradiction. It is no less certain, that so great a work as this is should take up a considerable part of our time. And it is equally certain, that all duties should be done in order, as far as possible, and, therefore,

* *Media* of Mr. Isaac Ambrose.

should have their appointed times.”* The measure which he adopted to do this varies, it is true, circumstantially from the class meeting, but substantially it is the same. “We spend Monday and Tuesday,” says he, “from morning almost to night, taking about fifteen or sixteen families in a week, that we may go through the parish, in which there are upwards of eight hundred families in a year;† and I cannot say yet that one family hath yet refused to come to me, and only a few persons excused themselves and shifted it off. And I find more outward signs of success with most that do come, than from all my public preaching to them. If you ask me what course I take for order and expedition, I may here mention, that, at the delivery of the catechisms, I take a catalogue of all the persons of understanding in the parish, and the clerk goeth a week before to every family, to tell them what day to come, and at what hour—one family at eight o’clock, the next at nine, and the next at ten, &c. ; and I am forced by the number to deal with a whole family at once ; but, ordinarily, I admit not any of another family to be present. Brethren,” he adds, “do I now invite you to this work without the authority of God, without the consent of all antiquity, without the consent of the reformed divines, or without the conviction of your own consciences? See what the Westminster Assembly speak occasionally, in the Directory, about the visitation of the sick: ‘It is the duty of the minister, not only to teach the people committed to his charge in public, but privately ; and particularly to admonish; exhort, reprove, and comfort them upon all seasonable occasions, so far as his time, strength, and personal safety will permit. He is to admonish them in time of health to prepare for death. And,

* Reformed Pastor, pp. 77, 78.

† This each of the ministers associated with him also did, thus making their large parish something like a large circuit, on which each of the preachers and leaders visits the classes so many times a year.

for that purpose, they are often to confer with their minister about the estate of their souls,’ ”* &c.

About the year 1677, Dr. Horneck, Dr. Woodward, and Mr. Smithies, at Cornhill, by their sermons and lectures, were made instrumental in the conversion of many young men, whom they met in private religious meetings, and “these,” says Dr. Woodward, “soon found the benefit of their conferences one with another, by which (as some of them told me with joy) they better discovered their own corruptions, the devil’s temptations, and how to countermine his subtle devices, as to which each person communicated his experiences to the rest.”†

The Methodist classes are exactly conformable to the customs of the early propagation of Christianity. “After men became Christians,” says Paley, “much of their time was spent in prayer and devotion, in religious meetings, in celebrating the Eucharist, in conferences, in exhortations, in preaching, in an affectionate intercourse with one another, and in correspondence with other societies.”‡

The more serious clergy in England “held weekly private meetings for religious edification, and it is probable Mr. Wesley had heard of these societies, and even attended them in the metropolis. Wherever, indeed, a revival of serious religion has taken place, and ministers have been in earnest to promote it, we see similar means adopted, as by Baxter at Kidderminster, during his eminently successful ministry there.”§ The plain state of the case was this: God had given Mr. Wesley large fruits of his ministry in various places, from which he was called away from time to time to other places, when his people were “as sheep having no shepherd,” exposed not only to the world, but to the per-

* Reformed Pastor, pp. 79, 80.

† Account of the Religious Societies in London, chap. ii.

‡ Evidences of Christianity.

§ Watson’s Life of Wesley, p. 38.

cutting clergy of the Church of England. Hence, Mr. Wesley was urged by the necessity of the case, either to provide for them himself, or leave them without religious care. The latter he could not do consistently with the objects of his ministry; and he wisely chose the former. But he carried his regulations no further than the necessity of the case required. "The hours of service were in no instance to interfere with those of the Establishment, and at the parish church the members were exhorted to communicate."*

It is true, however, that though the Methodist societies thus originated in the national church, in their interior organization they were independent of its ecclesiastical authority, which was, in fact, an original, practical, and partial separation from the Establishment; yet had the Establishment sanctioned the itinerant labors of Wesley and his successors, and the private religious meetings which he instituted, the great body of Methodists in England might have been retained in the communion of the national church till this day. The constitution of the Methodists, therefore, was a matter of moral necessity; and their final separation from the Church of England, after the death of Mr. Wesley, was a right guaranteed to them both by Christian liberty and the laws of their country.

II. No institution of Methodism is more important than that of the classes—not even the itinerancy; for the evangelical fruits of the itinerancy cannot long be preserved without the use or help of the classes. The system of class meetings may not be required by those churches which are provided with a settled ministry—residing among their flocks—making themselves acquainted in various ways with their communicants—becoming personally acquainted with the religious character and conduct of every individual in

* Watson's Life of Wesley, p. 92.

their charges—having suitable time, place, and opportunity for making necessary inquiries, and obtaining necessary information, that they may give particular instruction, reproof, exhortation, or advice, as occasion may require. But to an itinerant ministry, such as ours is, all this is impossible. The time of appointment to one field of labor is so short—and so much of this time is necessarily employed in breaking up, in removing, and in settling when the pastor reaches his new field of labor—and so much in riding and preaching—and so much in reading and preparing for the pulpit—and so much in necessary absence from a portion of his appointments to visit other parts of his circuit—that he has but a small proportion left to allow him to become acquainted with his flock. This was the deficiency Mr. Wesley felt so sensibly, and to supply which the societies were divided into classes, and leaders appointed, who henceforth became, in fact, auxiliary pastors, and should be men of irreproachable life, deep piety, prudence, and experience, each residing among the members of his class, that, becoming acquainted with their deportment in society, their connexions and pursuits in life, their peculiar dispositions, temptations, trials, and afflictions, he may bestow the proper spiritual care upon them individually. Thus, in the absence of the pastor, the leaders are prepared to give the religious counsel occasion may require. Thus, also, they are prepared to report to the pastor who are sick, who are delinquent, who are disorderly, who are walking uprightly, and who should be dealt with according to the discipline. And so, through the aid of faithful class-leaders, the pastor becomes acquainted with his whole field of labor, and is assisted in providing for its wants. Without the class-leaders, it is evident, those who are gathered into the church would suffer greatly for want of pastoral care.

From this consideration of the nature of the classes, we make the following observations:—

1. The preacher in charge of a circuit or station is invested with authority to appoint the leaders, because he is responsible to God for the care of the souls committed to his oversight.

2. It is the solemn duty of the preacher in charge to remove improper and unfaithful leaders, and supply their places with those who are faithful and properly qualified. And in the selection of proper men he can advise, if need be, with the senior brethren, local preachers, and stewards of his charge.

3. The preachers and leaders should co-operate promptly, actively, and harmoniously in the care of the classes: the leader in his attentions to his class, and in reporting the delinquent, the disorderly, and the sick to the preacher; and the preacher in visiting the sick, and in administering discipline in all cases of delinquency that will not amend, and in all cases of those who walk disorderly. If the leaders neglect their duty, the preacher will be ignorant of the condition of his charge, and the church must suffer, and the preacher be discouraged; or if the preacher neglect his duty, faithful leaders will become discouraged, and the church must suffer. Prompt, energetic, and harmonious co-operation between the preachers and leaders is indispensable to the purity, success, and prosperity of the Methodist church.

4. We shall here consider an objection: “The class should have power to elect its own leader.” (1.) In almost all cases, the class is so well satisfied with the leader provided by the preacher, as to prefer him to all others, which is a proof, *de facto*, that the classes are as well satisfied as if they had made their own selection. (2.) Those who are best qualified to be leaders, would not be candidates for the office. For such being most pious, and being best ac-

quainted with their own infirmities, and having the humblest views of their gifts and graces, would be most retiring, and thus the way would be open for the most forward, aspiring, and unqualified—as Charles Wesley expresses it :

“ How ready *he* is to go,
Whom God has never sent;
How cautious, diffident, and slow,
His chosen instrument.”

(3.) In the competition for leaders, the class, in many cases, would be divided, and warmth and bitterness be excited. The leader so elected would look with prejudice upon the minority as his opposers, and the minority would cherish hostile feeling toward him. (4.) In the stations the female classes meet separately, and cannot become acquainted with the deportment and qualifications of the candidates for the office, and so would not be able to select the proper leader. (5.) In many classes, on the circuits and stations, the majority are young and inexperienced, with whom a good singer, with a good stock of camp-meeting and revival songs, and a large share of zeal, would be an eligible candidate; and prudent counsels, wise advice, solid piety, and much experience, would not enter into the essentials of qualification. (6.) There would be no remedy to relieve the class when both the leader and the majority of the class should become lukewarm. The majority then at liberty would indulge in neglecting *class*, and engage in vain and frivolous amusements, which the leader might call *innocent*. The heart of the pious might bleed in vain; the pious part of the class, and of the church, might mourn in vain; and there would be no remedy. The blind would select their own guide, and the ruin of both would be inevitable. (7.) It would not effect what it proposes. The object proposed is to give to each class a leader of its own selection. But, in many cases,

the minority must meet with a leader whom they have *rejected*. (8.) And, finally, such a method is in direct conflict with the authority and responsibility of the pastor. He is responsible for the spiritual oversight of the flock, and hence has authority, and it is his duty, to provide the best leaders he can obtain to aid him in his work. If the classes, therefore, be invested with the right to choose their leaders, the authority of the pastor is repudiated, and his duty cannot be discharged. All these evils are avoided by the arrangement that exists in our church.

The indispensable necessity of the class meeting as an institution of the Methodist church is seen in another respect. An important part of the pastoral work of our itinerant ministry cannot be performed without it. It is the duty of the leaders to ascertain the wants of the poorer members, that relief may be extended to them, and to find out who are sick, that the pastor may visit them. Thus, it is the duty of the leader to see his members once in the week, either in class, or, if absent, at home. Such is the work of our preachers, especially on the circuits, that information on these particulars cannot be obtained, in all cases, without the aid of faithful leaders; and so, without the classes, the wants of the church, in a great degree, must be neglected by the pastor. In this case, how many a pious saint, amid the sufferings and temptations of sickness, would languish without consolation from the sympathizing pastor. How many a poor Christian would suffer, in want of even the small temporal relief which the church now supplies. And not until the needy or the sick had themselves sent intelligence to the pastor, could he ascertain what services were required. It was this, among other reasons, as we have seen, that caused Mr. Wesley to adopt this desirable and useful regulation; and as the Methodist ministry remains unchanged in its nature, the same necessity for the continuance and observance of the

regulation exists now, as then suggested and justified its adoption.

The indispensable necessity of this institution of our church is seen in another respect. It is the duty of the leader to inform the preacher who of his class "walk disorderly;" that is, are guilty of any impropriety or any immorality, that the proper steps in the administration of discipline may be taken by him who has the charge of the church. It would be impossible for the preacher, without the aid of the leaders, to obtain the knowledge of all such cases. Engaged, as he must be, from time to time, and so long, in another part of his work, and none being officially authorized to inform him, many a case of delinquency and immorality would transpire in his absence, and never reach his knowledge till too late to administer the proper correction or counsels to the offender, or prevent the scandal inflicted upon the church.

In a word, the abolition of the classes, and the disbanding of the leaders, would be disastrous to the Methodist church, and it would be impossible to determine where the line of ruin should be drawn, or what of value, except doctrine, would remain. It would be disastrous to the spiritual condition of our church. The pastor, as we have seen, could do but a small proportion of the work of spiritual care: the rest must be wholly neglected. It would be disastrous to the spiritual fellowship of our church. The bonds of union which now bind the leader to his class, and the members of the class to each other, would be greatly weakened, if not wholly severed; the incalculable advantages of mutual counsel, reproof, and encouragement, would be lost; and *intimate* spiritual union and communion of saints would no longer exist. It would be disastrous to the financial interests of our church. The leaders and stewards, in this respect, would have nothing to do, nothing to report, unless some other measure to raise supplies should be adopted. It would

disastrous to the world. The church being debilitated and prostrated by the abolition of its present wise, harmonious, and efficient system, spiritual and temporal, but little would remain of a peculiar nature to deserve the regard, respect, and admiration of the world, but little remain to exert a strong and salutary influence upon man. Nor is this all. The bond between the classes and the quarterly conference would be dissolved, and some other method of recommending proper candidates from the membership to preach must be adopted. Nor is this all. One of the best means of developing and cultivating ministerial gifts and graces would be lost to our church. Thousands of useful and eminent ministers in our church, no doubt, first felt their call to preach in the class-room, and when they became leaders, by their pious and varied exercises as leaders, they acquired that knowledge of spiritual things, and that habit of affording instruction, which enter into the inceptive preparation or groundwork of preaching the gospel. The exercises of public prayer, singing, administering instruction, reproof, warning, admonition, consolation, encouragement, visiting absent and delinquent members, spiritual attentions at the bedside of the sick, and the intimate acquaintance the leader forms with the pastor, and the knowledge he obtains of church matters in the leaders' meeting, all contribute much to qualify him to preach, and take charge of the church himself, when called and sent forth to preach. In the class-room, the leader learns the first lessons of the preacher, and when he becomes a preacher, he continues the exercises and labors of the leader on his circuit or station. Calamitous would be the day to the Methodist church, should this normal school of our ministry ever be abolished! God forbid that such a wo shall ever befall us! Nor is this all. The foundation of experimental religion and religious character is laid in the class-room: it is the nursery for young converts, the "babes in Christ."

Here we might dwell at length and with delight. The advice from the experienced leader, the recital of experienced Christians, the severe examination to which he subjects himself, the habitual and regular observance of this means of grace, the formation of religious habits and resolutions at a time the most critical, the gracious strength he obtains to contend with the trials and temptations of life, the help he acquires to resist and repress the remains of the carnal mind, and oppose and subdue old habits and besetting sins, the divine assistance he receives to detect and relieve many an infirmity and imperfection, the sensible growth in grace he makes from time to time, the refreshing views he enjoys of Christ and heaven and eternal rest, the love diffused in his heart for the brethren, for perishing sinners, and the cause of God, and the numberless motives, ever new and stronger, he feels to advance and conquer—all combine, in the class-room, to improve and establish the young Christian, to attach him to the church, and perfect him in Christ Jesus. Beside, in the class-room, he not only acquires a higher regard for the other means of grace connected with the church, but the best qualification to enjoy them. Mournful would be the day for young Christians in our church should the class meeting ever be abolished! Then, they would scarcely ever rise above their “first love,” yea, but few would even retain that long! This, indeed, is the lamentable result now, wherever the classes are habitually neglected, and this is mainly the reason why multitudes of young Christians in our church so soon fall away, and return to the world. The nature of the class meeting will more obviously appear in the consideration of the benefits of the institution, which we shall defer till the proper place. We shall close this part of the work with a single quotation from Bishop Morris:

“As to the peculiar institution of class meetings, whether we view it in its spiritual, pastoral, disciplinary, business,

or social aspect, it is of vast importance to us. Nothing, indeed, could supply its place, or fill the vacuum which its removal would occasion in the system of church polity of which it is a distinguishing feature. Settled pastors over single congregations may do without it, but itinerant, inter-changing pastors, having charge of numerous flocks, to be visited periodically, in order to perform their pastoral labor, find it indispensable to divide their societies into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode, and appoint leaders to look after them in their absence. These weekly meetings are to the church what schools are to colleges, and military training, by companies, is to an army—indispensable to her prosperity.”*

* Bishop Morris.—Intro. to Treatise on Class Meetings, by Rev. John Miley, A. M. pp. 14, 15.

PART II.

The Obligation of Class Meetings.

CHAPTER I.

OBLIGATION OF CLASS MEETINGS FOUNDED SUBSTANTIALLY UPON THE SCRIPTURES.

WE now enter upon debatable ground. The obligation of class meetings, as a test of membership, in the proper sense of the term, has been doubted by many private members of our church, who have had, and still have, a few supporters in our ministry. It is not questioned by these that the discipline enjoins the observance of the class meeting upon every member of our church, and that exclusion is defined as the penalty in every instance of "wilful and repeated neglect;" but it is questioned by them, whether as a test of membership it is scriptural, and whether the proper authorities in the church have the right to institute and impose it as a test of membership. We say, as such a test, it is scriptural, and that the proper authorities in our church have a right to impose it as such a test. Let us be clearly understood. We do not assume, that class meetings are *specifically* enjoined in the Scriptures; we admit that they are not; but we do assume, that they are *substantially* contained and enjoined in the Scriptures. Nor do we assume, that they should be made a test of membership in other churches; that is, in those churches that are under the care of a settled ministry; but we do assume, in the nature of things, they should be made a test of membership in our church, which is itinerant. Nor do we assume that the

name and mode of this social institution are the best that can be adopted, but we do affirm, we know no better that can be adopted, and do assume, that the present mode of Christian conference and communion is strictly and sacredly binding upon the church, so long as the authorities in the church shall see proper to retain and enjoin it. These positions we shall endeavor to sustain, and so place the obligation of class meetings as a test of membership in our church upon a solid basis. The first argument, which is scriptural, we give in this chapter. We have said, that class meetings are substantially scriptural, and the following are our proofs.

1. "Bear ye one another's burdens."* In the class meeting, better than anywhere else, Christians become acquainted with one another's infirmities and trials, and so know best how to extend to one another religious help. But for the exhortations and counsels given from time to time in the class-room, it is easy to see how the gradual and insidious progress of sin might induce spiritual declension and insensibility. By the exercises of the class-room, many a Christian has been roused from a state of formality and indifference, many a "feeble minded" Christian "comforted," and many a "weak" Christian "strengthened," who otherwise might have fainted and perished by the way. Man is a social, weak, and dependent being, and when controlled by the tender love of Christ, he often obtains the richest effusions of his grace in the holy fellowship and sympathies of his saints, by which he is greatly encouraged to hold up his head, and calmly wait for deliverance, amid the perils that surround him and the trials that oppress him. He feels that he is not alone, that Christ is with his disciples, and is the strength of his disciples, and that each a friendly aid affords in time of need. Thus, all

* Gal. vi. 2.

bear a part of the burden of each, and the whole body is held together and supported by the bonds of indulgent love.

2. Every private interview of Christ with his disciples was substantially a class meeting, of which he was the most gracious leader, and in which he instructed, admonished, rebuked, reproved, and encouraged, as occasion required. His almighty arm made their burdens light, and his stirring voice roused them affectionately from lethargy and fear. In private with his disciples he asked them, "Whom say ye that I am?" Never was there a more important question proposed to their experience than this; it was spiritual in the profoundest sense: it was proposed to the twelve, the apostolic class, by Christ, the great leader on this occasion. Their answer shows the extent of their faith: "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." And Christ calls them "blessed." This was a class meeting in the purest and highest sense. Again, afterward, when he met them in class privately, he addressed Peter particularly, who had denied him three times, repeating the question to him three times: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" *Lovest thou me?* How often is this question proposed by the faithful leader to his class respecting Christ! and how many a backslider is brought to reflection and repentance under its force! Many were the class meetings, precious and powerful, Christ had with his disciples before and after his death. He is with us still.

The Apostle Paul met with twelve disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus, and inquired of them, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" and he gave them the proper instruction. This was substantially a class meeting. He refers to the same thing in his intended visit to the saints at Rome: "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established; that is, that I may be comforted *together with you*, by the *mutual faith both of you and me.*"

3. "Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."* This refers to the few pious and faithful Jews, who, when the greater part of the Jewish church had abandoned the commandments and ordinances of God, resisted the surrounding corruptions, and assembled to observe the pure religion of their fathers, and encourage each other in working out their salvation. They conversed with each other on religious subjects, and this they did "often." The exact method adopted is not stated, nor is it important to the argument that it should have been stated; but in substance and advantages, it is obvious, there is a strong resemblance in this pious Jewish custom to the institution of the classes in our church. The same thing is expressed by David: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."† Again: "Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation."‡ Besides meeting together for public worship, here is a particular reference to a meeting at which those *only* who feared God were present, and who met solely for the object of mutual intercourse and profit.

4. "Exhort one another daily, lest any of you should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."§ As there is a natural disposition in man to be self-deceived, without the impartial oversight of others, Christians themselves, in a thousand things, might soon become insensible through the deceitfulness of weak human nature, and the influence of the world. Daily exhortation, that is, frequent and season-

* Mal. iii. 16, 17.

† Ps. lxvi. 16.

‡ Ps. cxi. 1.

§ Heb. iii. 13.

able admonition and instruction are required to discover to us our true nature, duty, and danger. And there is no means in our church, or in any other church, better calculated to accomplish these objects than the classes. The apostle implies the most intimate fellowship, without which they could not have exhorted each other.

5. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak."* This implies reciprocal encouragement and edification. It is evident, this cannot be done properly, or to much extent, in the general congregation; and, in our church, without the use of the classes, it would be almost impossible to know who are the unruly, the feeble-minded, or the weak. Beside, these exhortations refer to the duties of the individual members of the church to each other, and not to the special oversight of the pastor. These Christian duties are to be performed by themselves, in the *absence* of the pastor, which implies that the primitive Christians often met together to edify, warn, comfort, and strengthen one another. To the same effect is the exhortation of St. Jude: "But ye beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of Christ, &c. And of some have compassion, making a difference. And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire."† That is, those who are discouraged by the *appearance* of surrounding danger, or having sinned, are deeply penitent, treat with forbearance, and not with severity and harshness; and those who are self-confident, proud, and insensible, rescue with fear—fear of the holiness, justice, and truth of God. But this cannot be done in any Christian community, without a knowledge of one another, and without frequent intimate religious intercourse.

* 1 Thess. v. 11, 14.

† Jude 20, &c.

6. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* This is substantially the nature of the class meeting. No particular reference is made to regular and public worship; nor to any accidental meeting of Christians; but to some specific *time* and *place*, mutually agreed upon by Christians, for specially religious objects, and specially in the name of Christ: such is the class meeting, and the class meeting, as such, has been sealed by the presence of Christ ever since its incorporation in the foundation of our church.

7. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."† How near this comes to an exact description of the Methodist class meeting, any one acquainted with that means of "teaching and admonishing" can easily see.

8. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."‡ That is, let us diligently and piously care for one another, and consider each other's trials, difficulties, temptations, and weaknesses, and so sympathize with one another as to excite or encourage one another to good works toward God and man; not forsaking our *private* religious meetings, which are supporting and instructing in these times of suffering and persecution, and which some habitually and wilfully neglect. This is another graphic description of the substantial character of the Methodist class meeting.

Many other scriptures of the same import might be adduced, but these are amply sufficient to establish our first

* Matt. xviii. 20.

† Col. iii. 16.

‡ Heb. x. 24, 25.

argument. That these scriptures were designed for a casual application, cannot for a moment be rationally admitted; that they were designed for formal and regular use in the apostolic and primitive churches, and so by the church in all ages, seems rational and plain, no matter what formal mode of applying them be adopted, at any time, by any particular church. The mode which the Methodist church has adopted is the class meeting. The mode is a matter of church discretion and authority: the substance is scriptural and scripturally binding on all true believers.

The only objection of any force that can be urged against this argument is, that the church has no authority to institute and impose any mode of performing religious duties, not specifically enjoined in, or plainly inferable from, the Bible. The argument does not require this kind of support to establish it, for it cannot be proved, that *any specific mode* of performing religious duties is enjoined in the New Testament as invariable and of perpetual obligation. This is the error of the Baptists on the subject of immersion. All that is required to confirm the position we have taken, is to show that any particular church is invested with divine authority to institute and impose modes (of discharging religious duties) which, in its wisdom and discretion, it judges to be required by its peculiar nature to accomplish in the best manner possible the great objects of its mission, and which are not inconsistent with the written word of God; and such modes, when instituted and imposed, are solemnly binding on its members till modified or repealed. This shall be the work of the next chapter, and on this mainly turns the obligation of class meetings as a test of membership in the Methodist church.

CHAPTER II.

OBLIGATION OF CLASS MEETINGS, AS A TEST OF MEMBERSHIP, FOUNDED CIRCUMSTANTIALY UPON THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH.

1. The General Conference, which is the only legislative authority in our church, has no right, inherent or derived, to *legislate* for the church in the strict sense of the term. Christ, the founder of the church, and the apostles, whom he invested with authority to govern the church, had the sole right to legislate in the strict sense, and the apostles themselves could not go beyond what Christ had taught and the Holy Spirit inspired. Yet the General Conference has the right to adopt such prudential rules and regulations as it shall judge required, from time to time, to enable the ministry of our church to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and enforce discipline; in a word, to govern the church, and accomplish in the best manner possible all the parts of their work. The fundamental principles of ecclesiastical legislation, however, must always be in strictest harmony with the letter and spirit of the Bible: in proportion as divergence from this axiom is made, innovation and revolution must ensue, and the church be divested of its purity, simplicity, and authority.

2. If the laity have the right to make rules and regulations for the government of the church—that is, for preaching the gospel, administering the sacraments, and enforcing the discipline—it must either be a natural or acquired right. If it be a natural right, they had it when in a state of nature and were enemies of God and his church, and then it belongs to all men; and then every man in the United States has a

right to be represented in the General Conference and every other legislative assembly of the church of God; which is absurd. If it be an acquired right, it must have been acquired by becoming Christians. If so, the Bible, the great charter of Christ's spiritual kingdom, must clearly reveal and define it. Let it be shown, and we admit the right. If the right be acquired by becoming Christians, then all Christians have a common right to be represented in the General Conference; which is also absurd. Nor is it acquired by becoming *Methodists*, since it is nowhere found in the terms of becoming Methodists, nor in the book of discipline of the Methodist church. The truth is, the government of the Methodist church originated with the ministry, and they not only have the right to make rules and regulations for the government of the Methodist church, but, from the Bible, they can never transfer this to the laity. The laity *voluntarily* entered into the societies organized by Mr. Wesley, to be governed by the rules and regulations which he and his successors might make; and the laity still *voluntarily* enter into the Methodist church; the right to make new regulations, or to alter the old ones, being reserved to the ministry in the very terms of the compact. The preachers existed before the laity, and the government was originally and necessarily in their hands, which is the order of the Bible; and hence the *preachers* alone are invested with authority to govern, in strict harmony always with the spirit and letter of the Bible, all who *voluntarily* place themselves under their pastoral care.

3. The rules and regulations by which the preachers are to carry on their work ought to be made by the *preachers* themselves, because they only are responsible for its execution. What is their work? They are commissioned by the Holy Ghost, to preach the gospel, administer the *sacraments*, and maintain moral discipline among those over whom the Holy Ghost, in these respects, have made them over-

seers. If the laity of our church were allowed to participate in legislation, it is easy to see how they might interfere with the responsibilities of the preachers, in modifying their work, so as to destroy itinerancy, and settle the preachers permanently among their congregations; in prescribing to the preachers what doctrines they must teach, and so a way would be open for heresy of every kind; in insisting that the ordinances should be administered after such a mode, or with such a meaning, or to all indiscriminately who should desire them, or should be dispensed with altogether; in a word, in controlling the preachers in accordance with every worldly policy, corrupt motive, and passion which might predominate over themselves; to which it is obvious, the preachers could never submit, consistently with their solemn commission, since they are accountable to the great Head of the church only, for the manner in which they fulfil their commission. Thus immorality is prohibited by divine code, and exclusion from the church is specified as the just penalty; but how the church is to proceed in the investigation is not expressly defined in the Bible, because a general regulation might not only be inapplicable to all cases, but in some cases, from the particular circumstances of the church, be utterly impracticable. The mode of procedure, therefore, under such circumstances, must be provided by some wise conventional rule; and so all prudential regulations of the church must be adopted.

The ministry of Christ being invested with authority to teach wholesome doctrine, and govern the church with salutary discipline, the people are not authorized to tell the ministry what they shall teach, for Christ said to his ministry, "Teach *them* (the people) to observe all things whatever I have commanded *you*." The apostles had to gather a church before they could teach and govern it, and consequently they had to judge what they should teach, and how they should govern, since as yet no church had been created

to judge in these matters ; as in the case of missionaries, who, plunging into the moral solitudes of heathenism, find man ignorant of the true God and Jesus Christ, and the principles of church-government. The people, therefore, in the nature of things, cannot be the ultimate judges of doctrine and church-government. If the people were invested with authority in these matters, if they were possessed of the knowledge that would qualify them to instruct the ministry in these matters, then in what were the use in instituting the ministry at all ? The churches, when once formed, might then safely be left to themselves.

Again : if the people are to select and instruct their own teachers, then occasions may arise in which the "truth as it is in Jesus" may be corrupted and abandoned. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ; but after their own lusts shall heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears ; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables."* But the defence against this evil the apostle directly places in the authority of the ministry : "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. Preach the word ; be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine."† Be not carried away by the tide of corruption ; endure persecution for the truth's sake ; be faithful in the preaching and application of sound doctrine ; exercise the full authority of your ministry in the exercise of a salutary discipline.

Nor are the people invested with authority to tell the ministry how they are to be governed. In the description of the qualifications of a bishop, the apostle says, he must be "one who ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity ; for if a man know not how

* 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

† 2 Tim. iv. 2, 5.

to rule his own house, how shall he *take care* of the church of God?"* Again, and as decisively: "Remember them which have *the rule over you*, who have spoken unto you the word of God."† And in the same chapter: "Obey them that have *the rule over you*, and *submit yourselves*."‡ The words employed to express the work of a pastor include both the ideas of teaching or feeding and governing. "Out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall *rule* [*poimaino*] my people Israel."§ "To him will I give power over the nations; and he shall *rule* [*paimaino*] them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter, shall they be broken to pieces: even as I received of my Father."|| This settles the meaning of the oft-questioned and long-contested passage in the First Epistle of Peter: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. *Feed* [*poimaino*] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."¶ In these passages, *poimaino* means both to *feed and rule* the flock of Christ; that is, implies the performance of all the duties, and the exercise of all the functions, of the pastoral office. Again: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*, [*episcopous, bishops*,] to *feed* [*poimanein*] the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."**

It is essential to the great primitive object of Methodism, that the character of its ministry be in the keeping of the

* 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5. † Heb. xiii. 7. ‡ Heb. xiii. 17. § Matt. ii.
 ¶ Rev. ii. 26, 27. ¶ 1 Peter v. 1-4. ** Acts xx. 28. ¶

ministers themselves ; for whatever endangers the purity of the ministry, endangers the success and stability of Methodism ; and therefore one of its resplendent glories is, that its ministry is unfettered. And while there are properly balancing-checks to this liberty, providing for impeachment and expulsion, it is a singular proof of the integrity and purity of the Methodist ministry, that for now a hundred and ten years they have not abused this liberty ; and it is doubted whether a parallel instance of so large and influential a body of ministers can be produced, who have made the sacrifices they have, who have endured the same sufferings and hardships, and who have been exposed to the same temptations and dangers, and yet who have maintained a warmer allegiance to their primitive government, or a greater degree of moral purity, or performed a larger amount of useful labors, or more jealously guarded the rights and interests of their people, or been more respected and beloved by their people. If time and success are tests of the soundness of a principle, the Methodist ministry have them in this case.

The conclusion of some, that the denial of the right of the people to govern themselves is the same as to say that they have no privileges at all, is absurd. The people have most important and inalienable rights. They have the amplest scope for the exercise of all the sacred rights of conscience ; they are entitled to the use of all the means of grace connected with the church ; they have a right to the full enjoyment of all the privileges of rational, Christian liberty ; they are entitled to the faithful oversight of the ministry : in a word, “whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours ; and ye are Christ’s ; and Christ is God’s.”* As the rules and regulations enacted by the

* 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

ministry for the government of the church are to be consistent with the written word, such rules and regulations can no more deprive the people of any privilege to which they are justly entitled, than the written word deprives them of any such privilege. If, upon careful and prayerful examination, they conscientiously believe their pastor preaches doctrine contrary to the word of God, they may appeal, in a connection of churches like ours, from their own pastor to his fellow-pastors; and if in any instance of mal-administration of their pastor they see proper, they may seek redress also from his fellow-pastors; and in case of any enactment by the legislative authority of the church, which they conscientiously believe to be inconsistent with the written Word, it will be justifiable for them to use all prudent means to obtain its abrogation; and failing to obtain it, it will be justifiable for them to withdraw, and place themselves under the guidance of other pastors.

4. What is a *legislature*? A legislature *makes, originates* laws, not *explains* and *administers* them. Sovereignty is the law-making authority. The sovereignty of the church is neither in the laity nor the ministry, but in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is maintained in the fifth article of our religion, and in the last paragraph of our general rules. As the lawyer explains law at the bar, and the judge teaches and administers it on the bench, and yet are not legislators, so the General Conference explains, teaches, and administers the laws which Christ has prescribed for the government of the church. The sovereignty which originates and enjoins law also provides for its administration, by the appointment of judges and the institutions of courts; and in these courts the people have no part in the administration of law. Again: laws are usually enacted and given to the public as *general principles*; and it is the prerogative of judges to determine their *special application*. Thus, rules of court are adopted, and *decisions*

on points of law are made, and these become the *mode* or *manner* of applying the *statutes* in all inferior *judicatories*. Now the nature of the church is *moral*: the nature of the state is *civil*. The government of the state, which relates only to this world, may be constituted by the "wisdom of this world;" but the government of the church, which relates to a future world, is to be constituted by God himself. Christ originated the constitutional moral laws of his church, and instituted the ministry to teach and administer them. But the divine laws being revealed in an extensive volume, and mostly in *general principles*, a difference as to their *meaning* and the *manner* of their application may often occur. This circumstance gave rise to the various branches or divisions of the evangelical church, those associating together who agree best in these particulars. And thus ordinarily an epitome of views in a condensed form is adopted to secure and determine unanimity. But the main question is, *who is to determine and adopt this epitome?* The ministry or the laity? or both conjointly? But a creed must be *formed* and *preached* before the people can hear or believe it, or attach themselves to the ministry who teach it; and thus the people could not participate in its formation. This was the case with Moses and the prophets, with Christ and his apostles, with Luther and the reformers, and with Wesley. If, then, in the nature of things, the laity cannot form the epitome, *a fortiori*, they cannot mend it. And when the church is organized, and questions of doctrine and discipline arise, and new regulations are required, such as the form of admission into the church, of ordination, and the sacraments, the order of public worship, the appointment of men to the work of the ministry, the constitution of subordinate societies, such as the classes, and new officers to be appointed, such as the leaders and stewards,—all these belong exclusively to the prerogative of the ministry. In these matters, and all others of a similar

nature, the ministers decide as teachers and administrators of the divine law. Thus, respecting every article in our Creed, and rule and regulation in our Discipline, book, chapter, and verse in the Bible can be given for the *principle* on which they are founded, and the meaning we give to them.

5. The argument more directly drawn from the Scriptures.—We have said that all the powers which belong to the ministry are spiritual, because the constitution of the church is spiritual, and its ends are spiritual, relating wholly to the next world; and, consequently, are distinct from those of a civil nature and design, which relate wholly to this life. The primitive fathers excluded from the church all civil legislation and jurisdiction, and all coercive power. The Bible does the same. The nature of the Christian church requires it. And, in the nature of things, as God has appointed officers to govern his church, they must execute the powers of the church, for office implies power; and to say that all private Christians may execute these powers, is to say that there are no officers in the church. And, as there are distinct offices in the church, so they have their distinct powers, which exclude private Christians from the ordinary execution of any ecclesiastical power, as well as officers of a lower order from the execution of powers which belong exclusively to the chief officers of the church; just as private men in a civil government are excluded from the prerogatives and jurisdiction which belong to public and superior officers. Usurpation of power in the church would result in confusion and destruction, as it would in a civil society; indeed, it would be far more displeasing to God and dangerous to the authors of it, because the honor and authority of God and the eternal happiness of man are more directly assailed than in the latter case.

It has been seen that the officers of the church are

God's stewards, intrusted with the care and government of his church; and, consequently, private Christians have no power to dispense the ordinances of the gospel to others, since they are to expect them from the hands of God's ministers. No man is justified in taking the honor of being a minister of God, but the man who is called and commissioned by God himself. Christ himself did not assume any part of the office he came into the world to execute, till he was solemnly anointed to it by the descent of the Holy Ghost at his baptism. Nor did the apostles themselves, whom Christ instructed while he lived with them on earth, undertake authority to govern the church, till they were divinely called, set apart, and vested with power to do so. And St. Paul often insists upon his divine mission, and demands attention and submission upon that account. Beside, gifts and abilities, throughout the New Testament, are distinguished from a commission to exercise authority in the church, and described as antecedent qualifications to it. Qualifications however great, or abilities however splendid, are not sufficient to empower any man with authority to exercise the office of the ministry, who has not been recognised as called of God to the holy office, and ordained as such, where it is practicable, by those in authority in the church. A certain and more terrible punishment than any inflicted in this life awaits those who violate the sacred offices of the Christian ministry. The infliction may not be as sudden as under the Jewish economy, but as the offices of the Christian church are of divine appointment, and are more sacred and honorable than those of the Jewish church, as the substance is preferable to the type or shadow, the punishment of usurpers of the Christian ministry is not the less certain, though it be not inflicted till the final judgment, the proper season of punishment for offences under the gospel.

We have said that the powers of the ministry consist of

preaching the word, administering the sacraments, and maintaining the moral discipline of the church ; and that private Christians cannot discharge these powers. Consequently, the preachers, or officers of the church, only are invested with authority to make rules and regulations for the government of the church ; that is, to enable them to discharge, in the best manner possible, the powers of their office. And, let it be again observed, that the officers of the church have no authority to change or modify divine laws, or in any way pervert their plain and original meaning, for these are immutable ; and if any thing of this kind is attempted, the divine precept is plain and express—"We must obey God rather than men." Nor have they power to impose any article of faith, or rule of duty, or prescribe any condition of salvation or of church membership, which is neither expressly contained in the Scriptures, or cannot be certainly concluded as consistent with them. All they can prescribe relates to the preservation of the being and the regulation of the outward peace and order of the church. Whatever is left undetermined in the Scriptures in these respects, they have authority to determine. In many things, we repeat, the rules of Scripture are general. Thus, we are commanded to assemble together to worship God, but times and places for this purpose are not expressed. We are commanded to follow things that make for peace and edification, and to do all things decently and in order ; but the particular methods by which these objects are to be secured are nowhere specified. Timothy is commanded to "lay hands suddenly on no man"—and this is a standing injunction upon all bishops—but the character of the previous trials, the specific time of trial, and the methods of examining the abilities and behaviour of candidates for holy orders, are nowhere set down and determined. These things, and many others, being variable in their nature, with respect to them no invariable rules can be prescribed ; for the same

methods which at one time, or in one age or country, very much promote the peace and edification of the church and the salvation of man, may, at another time, and in another age or country, obstruct these ends. Things of this kind may be determined by particular churches. Thus, the times and places for the worship of God must be fixed, or there can be no assembling at all for his worship. The order and several services of worship must also be previously determined, or nothing but confusion will ensue. The division of any particular church into conferences, districts, stations, and circuits, and missions, may be made and varied, for the more convenient assembling together, and preserving order and moral discipline. For example, though the Jewish religion was delivered to one nation, and its principal parts confined to one place, and its circumstantial character strictly specified and limited, yet many rites, neither prescribed by Moses, nor mentioned in the Old Testament, existed among the Jews at the time of Christ. The whole temple-service of prayers and psalms, composed long after Moses' time, was not enjoined by any particular precept from God. The Jews added several rites to the paschal solemnity; they used a sort of baptism; and they had synagogues with appropriate officers and services, not prescribed by the Lord. Some of these our Lord himself observed. He frequented their temple-service, their synagogues, and adopted their baptism and their custom of blessing bread and wine after the paschal supper, as federal rites or sacraments of the Christian church. And if such latitude was given in the government of the Jewish church, in which almost every thing was exactly specified, it cannot be doubted that a greater liberty is left to the Christian church, which is designed to embrace all nations, and extend through all ages of time.

All we have said is sustained by the practice of the apostles. Beside the standing rules of the Gospel, they pre-

cribed various rules and regulations as the various churches under their care required. Thus, they enjoined that the converts from heathenism abstain from blood. They introduced the kiss of charity, which is several times mentioned; but subsequently occasioning scandal, it was wholly disused. In several of his epistles, St. Paul prescribes rules for the decency of divine worship, the avoiding of scandal, and other things not determined by Christ; and he speaks of customs established by himself and other apostles, and observed by the churches: "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."* There is, and ever will be, the same necessity of prescribing rules and regulations for the peace and good government of the church, and the order and decency of divine worship, as there was in the apostolic age. Things of this nature lie within the compass of the uninspired human understanding, assisted by the ordinary direction of the Holy Spirit.

That the ministry only are invested with authority to make rules and regulations for the government of the church, as necessity may require, may be further proved by express examples from the New Testament. Though the people had free access to the councils and assemblies of the apostles and primitive clergy of the church, there is no example of their giving definite voices there; "and when their advice was asked, this was understood to be done, that things might be carried on with unanimity, and not because their concurrence was believed necessary to give authority to any thing which was decreed."† "It is the very essence of a law, that it be made by the supreme power,"‡ without

* 1 Cor. xi. 16.

† Potter on Church Government, pp. 288, 289, to whom I acknowledge myself indebted mainly for the *scriptural* argument of this chapter.

‡ 1 Bl. Com. 46.

the control of any superior authority, depending upon no man, accountable to no man, and subjected to no superior jurisdiction, as, in the constitution of the Christian church, is the power of the clergy to make rules and regulations for the well-government of the church, according to the spirit and letter of the Bible. In the apostolic council held at Jerusalem, to consider the question, whether the Gentile converts should observe the law of Moses, though the people were allowed to be present, yet the apostles and elders are described as managing the whole affair. Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem, not to the people, but to the apostles and elders, about this question: "When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."* Next, it is said, the apostles and elders came together to consider the question, but no mention is made of the people, though it is stated that they were merely present: "And the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter."† Then the decree is said to be ordained by the apostles and elders, without any mention of the people: "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem."‡ And the argument is conclusive, if we leave out the conjunctive particle [*kai*] in the epistle which contains the decree, which should be done, as a moment's consideration shall prove, and then the decree will run in the names of the apostles and elders-brethren, *i.e.* Christian elders or rulers, in opposition to Jewish and other rulers. This is the *usus loquendi* in the Scriptures. Thus, Christians are often called men-brethren in opposition to Jews, and Jews are called the same in opposition to heathens.

* Acts xv. 2.

† Acts xv. 6.

‡ Acts xvi. 4.

“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, Men-brethren,”* [ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί.] The same expression is employed in other Scriptures.† St. Paul speaks of a wife-sister, *i.e.* a Christian wife, [αδελφὴν γυναῖκα.]‡ The particle *καὶ* was not in the text in the time of Irenæus,§ nor when the old Latin version was made; it is omitted in the Alexandrian, and other manuscripts of good authority; and it is probable that it was inserted in the text by some unskilful transcriber, to make the sense, as he might think, more rhetorical and perfect. With this conviction, the argument is undoubted, that the laity had no authority in this council, though they were present. They were present as witnesses, as the brethren are present now sometimes in our legislative assemblies. Beside, that the apostles and elders enacted this decree by their own authority, without the people’s consent, is evident from the consideration, that the laity of the church at Jerusalem had no authority over the laity of the church at Antioch and other places, where this decree was to be observed; especially as there is no evidence that the churches in these places gave express consent to the things enjoined, or that they were represented in this council; on the contrary, the decree is directed to the church in Syria, and others, no present in the council. From the evidence of Scripture, and the history of the early ages of Christianity, the power to legislate for the government of the church, in the manner stated, is lodged with the ministry of the church, and no others.

6. The power of executing laws also belongs to the ministry, because the supreme authority to make them, in the manner stated, belongs to the ministry, otherwise it

* Acts i. 16.

† Acts ii. 29, 37: vii. 2; xiii. 15, 26, 38; xv. 7, 13; xxii. 1; xxiii. 1; xxviii. 17.

‡ 1 Cor. ix. 5.

§ Lib. iii. cap. 12.

would be vain to make them. Some here object "that the Christian church had no jurisdiction, because it has no legislative power; or that it has no legislative power, because it has no jurisdiction." In civil matters, it is true, the church has no authority, either to make or execute laws. But in the government of the church the ministry have authority in both these respects. Again, the legislative authority may delegate power to execute the laws to those who have no authority to make laws. In civil societies, subordinate officers are intrusted with the execution of the laws, which none but the supreme authority can enact. And the church not only has power to govern its members by the laws which Christ has enacted, which are immutable, but also to enact and execute new rules and regulations, as the times and circumstances may require.

This power of legislation and administration, we repeat, is lodged with the ministry. It is generally admitted, that the power to preach, to baptize, and to celebrate the Lord's supper is vested exclusively in the ministry; but that the ministry have power to censure, and exclude members from its communion, is not so generally admitted; and that such is the power of the ministry we shall now endeavor to prove. As in civil societies, authority to legislate and administer laws is necessary for the protection of men's lives and property, without which authority men might almost as well live independent of one another; so, in the church, authority is necessary to attain the ends for which the church was founded; namely, to maintain the purity of divine worship, the general peace and order of its members, to secure men from the pollutions of the world, and to train them up in virtue and piety here for happiness hereafter. These ends could not be accomplished unless the church had power to exclude from its communion unworthy members who endeavor to oppose these ends by any methods whatever.

Again: the privileges of association with the church are

annexed to certain conditions. If these privileges were absolute and unconditional, no man should be debarred from them, how wicked soever he might be. But the Scriptures require faith and obedience in order to admission into the church, and they are required in order to continuance in the church ; and no reason can be given, why men who fail to discharge these conditions should not be excluded from the communion of the church. Among the principles of association with the church is the use of the sacraments ; and Christ has committed the dispensation of the sacraments to his ministers, who, as we have seen, are the governors of the church ; and hence, though Christ and his apostles had left no express directions, we might safely conclude that it is the duty of the ministry to exclude from the sacraments those whom they find unworthy of them.

But the ministry, or governors of the church, are invested with authority to exclude offenders by the positive authority of our Lord himself. This authority is contained in the celebrated promise made by Christ, first to Peter : “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven;”* and afterward to all the apostles equally: “Whoever sins ye remit, they are remitted ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.”† That is, you are invested with the solemn and responsible power to admit and exclude, formally, persons in accordance with the doctrines of salvation which I have prescribed and commanded you to teach ; and what ye shall do in harmony with the revealed laws of my kingdom, shall be ratified in heaven : and this Peter did in the declaration of the terms of salvation upon the opening of the Christian church on the day of Pentecost, and all the apostles did the same subsequently in the proclamation of the gospel.

* Matt. xviii. 18.

† John xx. 23.

The meaning is, every thing done and taught by you on earth, according to the order I prescribe, is at the same time ratified in heaven. This mode of expression was familiar to the Jews, and may be clearly elucidated by reference to Lev. xiii. 3, 23: "The priest shall look on him, (the leper,) and pronounce him unclean," and in verse 23, "the priest shall pronounce him clean;" and so, in the former case, he pronounces the person unfit for civil society, and in the latter, he pronounces the person fit to associate in civil or religious society. In like manner the apostles were invested with authority to pronounce who were fit or unfit to associate with the church of Christ, always however, pronouncing a judgment according to the doctrines divinely prescribed and commanded to be taught and applied in the government of the church.

That these terms mean *bidding* and *forbidding*, *granting* and *refusing*, declaring what is *lawful* or *unlawful*, *permitted* or *not permitted*, Dr. Lightfoot, after having given numerous instances, thus concludes: "To these may be added, if need were, the frequent, (shall I say?) or infinite use of the phrases, *bound* and *loosed*, which we meet with thousand of times over. But from these allegations the reader sees abundantly enough both the frequency and the common use of this phrase, and the sense of it also; viz. first, that it is used in *doctrine* and in *judgments*, concerning things allowed or not allowed in the law. Secondly, that to bind is the same with to forbid or to declare forbidden. To think that Christ, when he used the common phrase, was not understood by his hearers in the common and vulgar sense, shall I call a matter of laughter or of madness? To this, therefore, do these words amount: When the time was come wherein the Mosaic law, as to some part of it, was to be abolished and left off, and as to another part of it, was to be continued and to last forever, he granted Peter here, and to the rest of the apostles, chap. xviii. 18. a power to *abo-*

lish or confirm what they thought good; being taught this, and led by the Holy Spirit, as if he should say, whatsoever ye shall *bind* in the law of Moses that is *forbid*, it shall be *forbidden*, the divine authority confirming it; and whatsoever ye shall *loose*, that is, *permit*, or shall teach, that is *permitted* and *lawful*, shall be *lawful* and *permitted*. Hence they *bound*, that is, *forbade* circumcision to the believers; eating of things offered to idols, of things strangled, and of blood, for a time, to the Gentiles; and that which they bound on earth was confirmed in heaven. They *loosed*, that is, allowed purification to Paul, and to four other brethren, for the shunning of scandal, (Acts xxi. 24;) and in a word, by these words of Christ it was committed to them, the Holy Spirit directing, that they should make decrees concerning religion, as to the use or rejection of Mosaic rites and judgments, and that either for a time or forever. Let the words be applied by way of paraphrase to the matter that was transacted at present with Peter: ‘I am about to build a Gentile church,’ saith Christ, ‘and to thee, O Peter, do I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that thou mayest first open the door of faith to them; but if thou asketh by what rule that church is to be governed, when the Mosaic rule may seem so improper for it, thou shalt be so guided by the Holy Spirit, that whatsoever of the law of Moses thou shalt *forbid* them, shall be *forbidden*; whatsoever thou *grantest* them, shall be granted; and that under a sanction made in heaven.’ Hence, in that instance, when he should use his *keys*, that is, when he was now ready to open the gate of the gospel to the Gentiles, (Acts x.,) he was taught from heaven, that the consorting of the Jews with the Gentiles, which before had been *bound*, was now *loosed*; and the eating of any creature convenient for food, was now *loosed*, which before had been *bound*; and he in like manner *looses* both these. Those words of our Saviour, (John xx. 23,) ‘Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted to them,’
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for the most part are forced to the same sense with these before us, when they carry quite another sense. Here the business is of *doctrine* only, not of *persons*; there of *persons*, not of *doctrine*. Here of *things lawful* or *unlawful* in religion, to be determined by the apostles; there of *persons obstinate* or *not obstinate*, to be *punished* by them or *not to be punished*. As to *doctrine*, the apostles were doubly instructed: 1. So long sitting at the feet of their master, they had imbibed the evangelical doctrine. 2. The Holy Spirit directing them, they were to determine concerning the legal doctrine and practice, being completely instructed and enabled in both by the Holy Spirit descending upon them. As to the *persons*, they were endowed with a peculiar gift, so that the same spirit directed them if they would retain and punish the sins of any; a power was delivered into their hands of delivering to Satan, of punishing with *diseases*, *plagues*, yea, death itself, which Peter did to Ananias and Sapphira; Paul to Elymas, Hymeneus, and Philetus,"&c.*

Again: "The Father hath committed authority to the Son to execute all judgment,"† and the Son promised the twelve apostles that they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.‡ The Son is the chief Shepherd,§ and the apostles are the shepherds under him, intrusted with the care of the flock.|| The Son was, in a peculiar sense, the King of the Jews, and after his death received power over all the world, and so after his death commissioned the apostles to admit all nations into the church: "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them,"¶ &c. The Son is the foundation and the corner-stone on which the church is built;** and the apostles are called a part of

* Quoted by Dr. A. Clarke, *Commentary*, Matt. xvi. 19.

† John v. 7.

‡ Matt. xix. 28.

§ John x. 11. Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Peter v. 4.

|| John xi. 15-17.

¶ Matt. xxviii. 18, 19.

** 1 Cor. iii. 11.

this foundation, and the wall of the new Jerusalem is said to have twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles;* and the church itself is called the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.† That in these and other passages of Scripture the apostles were invested with great authority in the government of the church, there can be no doubt. And it is of the highest importance that we define the nature and extent of their authority and office, which may be done by an examination of their official administration and execution after the ascension of Christ, bearing in mind always that what they taught and did was taught and done by the command of Christ, and under the guidance of the infallible Spirit.

First, let us consider apostolic acts that related to the members of the church without distinction. So complete was the system of religious and moral duties prescribed by Christ, that the apostles made no addition of new duties; but when any of Christ's laws required explanation, their judgment was obeyed as expressing the will of Christ. They were invested with authority to enjoin what they saw was required for the external peace of any church which they formed, or the external order and decency of divine worship. In the book of Acts we find few examples of the exercise of this authority, because this book is scarcely more than a history of the propagation of the gospel, and the conversion of the first churches to the faith, and little is said about their subsequent government. There is one prominent example, however, in which the apostles and elders of Jerusalem decreed, that Gentile converts should be released from obligation to observe the Mosaic law, some few precepts, necessary for those times, excepted. But in the Epistles of St. Paul we find many rules and directions

* Rev. xxi. 14.

† Eph. ii. 19, 20.

for the government of the churches, never expressly enjoined by Christ, and some of them expressly enjoined by St. Paul's authority. The 7th, 8th, 11th, and 14th chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians are of this character. "And to the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord; but to the rest speak I, not the Lord."* And he promises to make other regulations at his coming: "And the rest will I set in order when I come."† He refers to other rules, appointed by him in other churches, which are not said to have been made by Christ: "And so ordain I in all the churches."‡ He exercised the same authority over the Thessalonians: "We have confidence that ye both do, and will do the things which we command you. When we were with you we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. Them that are such we command, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."§ And these rules, enacted by apostolic authority, were enforced by suitable punishments, and recognised by the churches: "And his inward affection is more abundant towards you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him."|| This is said of Titus, whom he had sent with authority to them; and he often reminds them of his own authority, which the Lord had given for edification: "Wherefore I write these things being absent, lest being present, I should use sharpness, [ἀποτομα] according to the power (authority) which the Lord has given me to edification, and not to destruction."¶ *Ἀποτομα*, (*a cutting off*) implying his apostolic authority to inflict punishment, but which he wished to use rather for edification. And by virtue of the same authority, he threatens to come unto them with a *rod*, *to revenge all disobedience*.** That he

* 1 Cor. vii. 10, 11.

† 1 Cor. xi. 24.

‡ 1 Cor. vii. 17.

‡ 2 Thess. iii. 4, 10, 12.

|| 2 Cor. vii. 15.

¶ 2 Cor. xiii. 10.

** 2 Cor. x. 6, 8; xiii. 10.

would be found among them such as they would not, and that he would not spare.†* He “commands the Thessalonians to withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions which they received of him,” and “if any man obey not our word,” he continues, “note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”‡ By “traditions” he means the instructions which he had given in his First Epistle to this church, and which had been construed by many as indicating the proximity of the kingdom of God, who consequently gave up working, and wandered about in fanatical idleness, while there was yet a number of quiet persons who resisted the fanaticism; and these the apostle commands to withdraw from the communion of those who walked disorderly. In like manner he requires the Corinthians “not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, do not eat.”§ In his absence he condemned the incestuous Corinthian: “I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present, that such an one be delivered to Satan, and that he be put away from among you.”|| In like manner he delivered Hymeneus and Alexander unto Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme.¶ And he writes to the church at Corinth to know whether the judgment or sentence he gave in the case of the incestuous person, has been executed, and whether they are obedient in all other things: “For to this end also did I write that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.”**

The apostles exercised the power and authority of pardoning and absolving from punishment, in conformity to the

* 2 Cor. xii. 20.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 2.

‡ 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14.

¶ 1 Cor. v. 11.

|| 1 Cor. v. 3-5, 7, 13.

¶ 1 Tim. i. 20.

** 2 Cor. ii. 9.

requisitions of the gospel. Upon the repentance of the incestuous person above mentioned, St. Paul decided: "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment;" and he adds, "to whom ye forgave any thing, I forgave also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it for your sakes, forgave I it in the person of Christ;*" that is, in conformity to the gospel of Christ committed to me. That the apostles were invested with authority to govern the church, may be further proved from a discussion that arose at this time in the Corinthian church. Certain persons denied St. Paul's authority to govern the church, not that the authority which he exercised belonged to the *apostolic office*, for this would have placed upon him the defence of the power of the apostles to govern the church; but they denied that he was an apostle, because he had been a persecutor, and was not one of the twelve, and so they chose rather to be called the followers of Apollos, an eloquent orator, or of Cephas, the first apostle. And so St. Paul proceeds to prove himself to be an apostle, both in a general and a particular sense: "Am I not an apostle? If I be not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you, whom I have converted, and on whom I have conferred the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that ye are the seal of mine apostleship in the Lord."† Indeed, he tells them that he was not a whit behind the chiefest apostles;‡ and concludes, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds."§ Thus the apostle, having proved his right to the apostolic office, proved his right to govern the church.

That the ministry are invested with judicial authority over the church, in the manner stated, is expressly declared in the following command of Christ: "If thy brother shall

* 2 Cor. ii. 6, 10.

‡ 2 Cor. xi. 5.

† 1 Cor. ix. 1, 2.

§ 2 Cor. xii. 12.

trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone ; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church ; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."* The order here is, private conference with the offender ; then admonition before witnesses ; then complaint to the church ; then the sentence of the church, that separates the obstinate offender from the communion of the faithful, which reduces him to the state of heathens. But it is not to be inferred that the whole church considered the case, and gave sentence. It is a common way of speaking, to ascribe to any society what is done by the rulers of it, or by some constitutional proceeding. In political bodies, a judicial sentence by those in authority is the sentence of the whole body, though the greater part never heard of it. Thus complaints are to be made to the rulers of the church, who are to investigate and dispose of them according to the rules and regulations made and provided for them. The direction is general ; and the rulers of the church, in accordance with the Bible, are to determine the character and mode of proceeding. "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."† That is, this authority is to be exercised upon the principles and doctrines which Christ had already taught them. For whatever was done and taught by the apostles in accordance with what Christ had taught them, was in accordance with his will in heaven, just as if still with them in the church

* Matt. xviii. 15-17.

† John xx. 21-23.

on earth. And so with the rulers of the church, to the end of the world.

This is confirmed by the sense and practice of the apostles. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, they were struck dead by God, in attestation of the apostolic authority of Peter to determine what was wrong in their conduct. Simon the magician was excluded from the church by Peter: “thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.”* That is, thou hast no part in the gospel—*τω λόγω τούτω*—which is the same as to be excluded from the communion and privileges of the church founded upon the gospel covenant. This was understood by the primitive church to be the meaning of this phrase; and so it was decreed, in one of the apostolic canons, “That if any bishop, priest, or deacon, gives money to be ordained, both the person ordained, and he who ordained him, shall be deposed from their office, and wholly rejected from communion, as Simon the magician was by Peter.”† The case of the incestuous member of the Corinthian church, already alluded to, is another striking example of apostolic executive authority: “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath done this deed: in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”‡ Here sentence is passed by the apostolic authority of Paul, expressed in the phrase, “my spirit”—an authority conferred on him by the Lord Jesus. This sentence is passed by the church, not by the whole congregation, but according to the ecclesiastical process, whatever it was, at this time in use in this church, and in accordance with the constitution

* Acts viii. 20.

† Apos. com. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 3-5.

of evangelical principles framed by Christ himself, the supreme lawgiver. As baptism signifies renunciation of the devil and all his works, and all persons covenant to do this at their baptism, all who break this baptismal covenant disobey Christ, and openly adhere to Satan, and so are to be delivered again to Satan, and reduced to the state of heathens; not in order to their eternal damnation, but for their admonition, correction, recovery, and salvation, by bringing them to repentance and faith, as is evident from the apostle's reference to this case again in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "Sufficient to such an one is this punishment, which was inflicted of many;";* which indicates that the apostle directs the church to comfort and forgive the offender, by restoring him to the communion of the church. That is, the censure which he had before decreed, in the name and by the authority of Christ, he now remits by the same authority: "To whom ye forgave any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgive any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it, in the person of Christ;";† which is proof that the apostles possessed judicial power to censure upon offence, and to remit censure upon repentance. And though this was done in the presence of the church, or a select number, yet the censure and the remission were decreed by apostolic authority: "Therefore put away from you that wicked person:"‡ "for this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things."§ In other passages he threatens to come to the disobedient with the rod, and to the obedient he promises to come with love and in the spirit of meekness. In other places he threatens he would not spare, but would use sharpness, and revenge all disobedience, and this by the authority which the Lord had given him.|| And again he

* 2 Cor. ii. 6.

‡ 2 Cor. ii. 9.

† 2 Cor. ii. 10.

|| 2 Cor. x. 6, 8; xiii. 2, 10.

§ 1 Cor. v. 13.

says: "I fear, lest when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not,"* which certainly means his exercising authority in censuring offenders, in accordance with the gospel.

False doctrine is also a ground of expulsion, as much as treason is in civil law, which is as just a ground of civil punishment as the violation of constitutional or statutory law, or any other civil crime, is. St. Paul tells Timothy that he had delivered Hymeneus over to Satan, who had blasphemed and made shipwreck of the Christian faith, and of whom he says, that he "had erred concerning the faith, saying, that the resurrection is passed already."† He directs the Romans to shun the company of those who sowed dissensions among them; that is, expel such from the church: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."‡ And to the Thessalonians he writes: "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions he received of us."§ And again: "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."|| Indeed, St. John not only requires the church to shun the company of heretics, but to deny them common civilities: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed. For he that biddeth him God-speed, is partaker of his evil deeds."¶ But not only had the apostles authority to make and execute ecclesiastical rules and regulations, but the churches to which they wrote had inherent power, by the proper authori-

* 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21.

† 1 Tim. i. 19, 20; 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

‡ Rom. xvi. 17.

§ 2 Thes. iii. 6.

|| 2 Thess. iii. 14.

¶ 2 John 10, 11.

ties, to do the same, according to particular and general precepts given by the apostles. St. Paul writes to Timothy: "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses:"* which precept implies, that accusations might be received against private members of the churches also, and witnesses heard and censures passed, if found guilty. And he writes to Titus: "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject:"† which imports that heretics, after the proper trial, are to be excluded from the communion of Christians. St. John threatens to expel Diotrephes for a very high abuse of his jurisdiction: "Wherefore if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth,"‡ which implies that, after proper trial, he would depose him from his office. And so the angel or governor of the church at Ephesus had authority to try and convict false prophets;§ and the governor of the church at Pergamos was severely reproofed for retaining the Nicolaitans in the communion of the church; and the ruler of the church at Thyatira, for suffering the woman Jezebel.||

It seems utterly inconsistent with the nature of church government that laymen should have this jurisdiction, or determine rules and regulations in church trials.¶ Primitive ages afford no examples of the kind.

It has been objected, that mischievous and pernicious consequences have followed from the undue use of clerical

* 1 Tim. v. 19.

† Titus iii. 10.

‡ 3 John 9, 10.

§ Rev. ii. 2.

¶ Rev. ii. 15, 16, 20.

|| "That the power of inflicting censures on offenders in a Christian church is a fundamental right, resulting from the constitution of the church, as a society of Jesus Christ, and that the seat of this power is in those officers of the church who have derived their power originally from the founder of this society, and act by virtue of the laws of it"—is a principle which Stillingfleet, in his *Irenicum*, endeavors to make good. The power of discipline, he argues, should be administered by those who have the care of the churches, and these are the several pastors of them.—Pages 444, 458.

jurisdiction. And yet we must not conclude that the ministers of the church have not this jurisdiction. It would destroy all government, spiritual and civil, to reject plain and undoubted laws, and wise and proper authority, because remote and uncertain consequences and inconveniences attend them. There is no institution in the world, divine or human, which weak, designing, and wicked men may not abuse to evil purposes. "If there was no government, there would be no tyranny, no rebellion; if no property, there would be no rapine; if there was no faith, there would be no heresy; nor any schism, if there was no union between the members of the church; and therefore the same reason which some have urged against excommunication, will oblige us to give up our civil government and properties, our Christian faith and communion, and consequently both our church and state."* The ends for which the church was instituted could not be accomplished without a proper form of government. These ends are principally the following:—The honor of God and his church requires that offenders be expelled from Christian communion. Christ gave himself for the church, "that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it might be holy and without blemish."† Consequently, if wicked men are kept in the church, the design of the constitution of the church is perverted, our Lord, its founder and head, is dishonored, and his holy religion degraded. The permission of such men to worship God in the public congregation, to receive the holy sacraments, which are the seals and pledges of his favor, and to be regarded as a part of his chosen generation, or royal priesthood, or holy nation, or peculiar people, is not only an open affront to him, but gives a great occasion of scandal to his enemies and his religion. And therefore

* Potter, on Church Government, p. 346.

† Eph. v. 26, 27.

St. Paul tells the Jews, "that the name of God was blasphemed through them among the Gentiles."* And so the prophet told David, in the case of Uriah, that he must be punished, because he had given the enemies of the Lord occasion to blaspheme.† The church is considered as sanctioning the scandalous lives of her members, when she neglects to clear herself, by reforming or excluding such from her communion. The dignity and reputation of the church are never so great as when discipline is exercised with severity, impartiality, and vigor, as was the case in apostolic and primitive ages, and in early Methodism. And wherever primitive discipline has been suspended, and Christians have lived like the rest of men, though the church has been protected by civil power, and flourished with outward splendor, and Christianity, as a system, has been exalted in public opinion, fewer converts than formerly have been added to her communion, and a far greater proportion of her own members have lost their first love and zeal for God. In the next place, the design of church government or discipline is to reform offenders. St. Paul affirms that his authority to exercise discipline is "the power which the Lord had given him for edification, and not for destruction."‡ The salutary effect of the exercise of this authority, in the case of excommunicating the incestuous Corinthian, is seen in his reformation and restoration to communion. Scarcely any thing contributed more to keep Christians from offending than the severity of primitive discipline. A public expulsion from the church, and from the communion and confidence of those for whom we have the highest love and reverence, is a strong appeal to fear and shame, two prevailing passions of the heart; and thus St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may

* Rom. ii. 24.

† 2 Sam. xii. 14.

‡ 2 Cor. x. 8; xiii. 10.

be ashamed."* In the terrible retribution upon Ananias and Sapphira, "great fear came upon the church, and upon as many as heard it."† St. Paul smote Elymas, the sorcerer, with blindness, and so restrained him from turning away Sergius Paulus, the deputy of Cyprus, from the faith.‡ And thus Christians, Jews, and infidels had cause to fear the exercise of apostolic power. It is true, this miraculous method of punishing has for ages ceased from the church, but a greater cause of fear, eternal punishment, still exists; to which a just expulsion from the church virtually consigns every finally impenitent offender, and which will confirm the sentence of the church. Exclusion from the church must cause the careless and inconsiderate to think seriously upon their condition; and ministers and other Christians should admonish, instruct, and encourage all such to reform and return to the church, as St. Paul advises the Thessalonians to do in the case of a brother whom he requires them to avoid at other times: "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."§ Beside, the exercise of ministerial discipline in excommunicating offenders is a means of preserving the rest of the church from corruption. This is the reason St. Paul gives for the expulsion of the incestuous Corinthian: "Know ye not, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven."|| The effect of retaining wicked men in the church is still more clearly set forth in what Paul says to Timothy: "Shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a canker, of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying, that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some."¶

The exercise of this authority is agreeable to the general

* 2 Thess. iii. 14.

† Acts v. 11.

‡ Acts xiii, 8, 11.

§ 2 Thess. iii. 15.

|| 1 Cor. v. 6, 7.

¶ 2 Tim. ii. 16-18.

sense and practice of mankind. In civil societies, laws are enacted and methods appointed for punishing notorious offenders, either by confinement, death, or banishment. And so, in voluntary associations, those members are excluded who give disturbance to the rest. Among the Jews, notorious offenders were punished with death : “The soul that doth aught presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.”* After the Babylonish captivity, by the direction of Ezra, the children of the captivity were commanded to gather themselves together unto Jerusalem ; and whoever would not come in three days, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation.† Expulsion from the church was very frequent in our Saviour’s time, and he seems to allude to it, when he tells the apostles that the rest of the Jews shall separate them from their company.‡ The rulers of the Jews agreed that if any man should confess that Jesus is the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue ;§ that is, expelled from the Jewish church. Thus, “among the chief rulers many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”|| In about sixty passages in which this word occurs in the New Testament, it means a place for divine service, and no other sense can rationally be put upon it. And so, in the practice of other nations, profane persons were excluded from all holy mysteries : *Semper piae initiationes arceant profanos.*¶ In Greece and at Rome, before solemn prayers and sacrifices, it was proclaimed, “Be gone, all that are profane.”** Some sort of excommunication was observed by all nations.

* Numb. xv. 30.

† Ezra x. 7, 8.

‡ Luke vi. 22.

§ John ix. 22.

|| John xii. 42.

¶ Tertul. Apol. cap. vii.

** Procul, O procul este, profani, conclamat vates ; totoque absiste, luco,—Æneid. vi. 259.

7. The authorities on this subject are abundant. It "is left to the prudence of every particular church to agree upon that form of government which it judgeth most conducive within itself to *attain the end of government*, the peace, order, tranquility, and settlement of the church."^{*} The Irenicum is an elaborate—the most elaborate—argument of uninspired men, in proof of this great truth. This great truth Stillingfleet states more fully in the following language: "In which sense I assert any particular form of government agreed on by the governors of the church, *consonant to the general rules of Scripture*, to be by divine right; *i.e.* God by his own laws hath given men a power and liberty to determine the particular form of church government among them. And hence, it may appear, that though one form of government be agreeable to the world, it doth not follow that another is not; or because one is lawful, another is unlawful: but one form may be more agreeable to some parts, places, people, and times, than others are. In which case that form of government is to be settled which is most agreeable to the present state of a place, and is most advantageously conducive to promoting the ends of church government in that place or nation."[†] This right or power of those in authority in a particular church to determine its form of government, is founded upon a divine law or principle immutable in itself, and obligatory in all ages of time; *viz.*, that such things as are necessary to the being, upholding, and continuance of the church of God, concurring with the written word, be observed, as preaching the word, administering the sacraments, and church discipline. And so, if we can prove, as we think we can, that the institution of class meeting is essential to the being, upholding, and continuance of the Methodist Church as an itinerant church, it will follow that the observance

* Stillingfleet's Irenicum, p. 36.

† Ibid. p. 41.

of it must be substantially a scriptural test of membership.

That each evangelical church has a divine right to adopt any form of government, conformably to the written word, is the almost unanimous verdict of the most eminent divines who lived during, and have lived since, the Reformation. Not to detain the reader with a multitude of quotations in proof of this, I begin with the testimony of Stillingfleet: “I believe there will, upon the most impartial survey, scarce be one church of the Reformation brought, which doth embrace any form of government *because it looked upon that form as only necessary by an unalterable standing law; but every one took up that form of government which was judged most suitable to the state and condition of their several churches.* But, that I may the better make this appear, I shall make use of some arguments, whereby to demonstrate that the most eminent divines that have lived since the Reformation have been all of this mind, *that no one form is determined as necessary for the church of God in all ages of the world.”** And from the authorities which he adduces, we select the following: “Archbishop Whitgift, frequently against Cartwright, asserts ‘that the form of discipline is not particularly and by name set down in Scripture;’ and again, ‘No kind of government is expressed in the Word, or can necessarily be concluded from thence;’ which he repeats over again: ‘No form of church government is by the Scriptures prescribed to or commanded the church of God.’ And so Dr. Cosins, his chancellor: ‘All churches have not the same form of discipline, neither is it necessary that they should, seeing it cannot be proved that any certain particular form of church-government is commanded to us by the word of God.’ To the same purpose Dr. Low: ‘No certain form of govern-

ment is prescribed in the word, only general rules laid down for it.' Bishop Bridges: 'God hath not expressed the form of church-government, at least, not so as to bind us to it.' Dr. Sutcliffe (*de Presbyterio*) largely disputes against those who assert that Christ hath laid certain immutable laws for government of the church. Crakanthorp, against Spalatinus: 'It has been transmitted, therefore, by the apostles, but though transmitted, it is changeable and to be changed, according to the experience and judgment of the church.' Chillingworth: 'The external forms, and orders, and government may be diverse in diverse places.' Zanchy, in his commentaries upon the fourth command: 'No particular form to be prescribed, but only general rules laid down in Scripture that all be done to edification.' The judicious Amyraldus: 'Since, therefore, Christ and the apostles wisely settled this, it belongs to all particular churches to be governed by their pastors, and to be ruled by some form which the necessity of the case may require. But what that form should be, whether some should excel others in authority or not, hath neither been defined by the nature of the thing, nor settled by Christ or the apostles. But, in the first place, for the sake of peace, it seems to have been, thus far, resolved on, that after whatever law the pastors of evangelical churches have existed, that they should in the same manner proceed, but that no one should endeavor to destroy the constitution of the others. Therefore, in whatever manner certain forms of church-government seem more suitable and accommodating to some to obtain that discipline or object of church polity, nevertheless God, who is the author and guardian of all society, (evangelical,) is not willing that all congregations should be held by the same law, but he willed to each a power to compose laws for itself, which he sanctioned by his own authority. Though there is no doubt but that of various methods of church-government some are more conclusive than others to obtain

that which religion has established as the end, nevertheless the most wise and indulgent Being willed that each church should have the right of enacting those laws for itself which have reference to discipline and the preservation of order, so that the church do in its orders but observe the general rules laid down in Scripture.''"*

"We are left then, and, indeed, unavoidably led to the conclusion that, in respect of these points, the apostles and their followers were, during the age of inspiration, supernaturally withheld from recording these circumstantial details, which were not intended by divine Providence to be absolutely binding on all churches, in every age and country, but were meant to be left to the discretion of each particular church."† "While the *principles*, in short, are clearly recognised and strongly inculcated, which Christian communities and individual members of them are to keep in mind and act upon, with a view to the great objects for which these communities were established, the *precise modes* in which these objects are in each case to be promoted are left —one can hardly doubt, studiously left—undefined."‡

"The church is *one*, then, not as consisting of one society, but because the various societies or churches were then modelled, and ought still to be so, on the same principles; and because they enjoy common privileges—one Lord, one Spirit, one baptism. Accordingly, the Holy Ghost, through his agents, the apostles, has not left any detailed account of the formation of any Christian society; but he has very distinctly marked the great principles on which all were to be founded, whatever distinctions may exist among them."§ "Negatively, it (church) consisted not in a uniformity of rites and customs; for every particular church was at liberty to follow its own proper usages;

* Iren. pp. 416, 417, 419, 422, 426—427.

† Whately's Kingd. of Christ, p. 88.

‡ Ibid. p. 90.

§ Encyclopædia Metropolitana, Age of Apostol. Fathers, p. 774.

one church was not obliged to observe the rites of another, but every one followed its own peculiar customs.”*

“It seems to belong to the very essence of a community that it should have—1st, *Officers* of some kind; 2dly, *Rules* enforced by some kind of penalties; and, 3dly, some power of admitting and excluding persons as *members*.† Again: “*Right* and *duty* are reciprocal; and consequently, since a church has a *right* (derived, as has been shown, both from the very nature of a community, and from Christ’s sanction) to *make* regulations, &c., not at variance with Scripture principles, it follows that *compliance* with such regulations must be a *duty* to the individual members of that church.”‡ Again: “Any one who sanctions a society, gives, in so doing, his sanction to those essentials of a society, its government—its officers—its regulations. Accordingly, even if our Lord had *not* expressly said any thing about ‘binding and loosing,’ still the very circumstance of his sanctioning a Christian community would necessarily have implied his sanction of the institution, ministers, and government of a Christian church, so long as nothing is introduced at variance with the positive enactments and the fundamental principles laid down by himself and his apostles.”§ Again: “The universal church—there being *one*, in reference, not to any one government on earth, but only to our Divine Head, even Christ, ruling Christians by his Spirit—which spoke to them from time to time through the apostles while these were living, and speaks still in the words of the Christian Scriptures, it follows that each Christian is bound (as far as church authority extends) to submit to the ordinances and decisions, not repugnant to Scripture, of the particular church of which he is a member.”||

“As all governments are necessitated to make use of laws,

* King’s Prim. Church, p. 142. † Whately’s Kingd. of Christ, p. 63.

‡ Ibid. p. 118.

§ Ibid. p. 123.

|| Ibid. p. 148.

and other political means, to preserve their constitution, so the church of Christ, which has a certain government annexed to it, that it may preserve itself from ruin and confusion, has certain laws and orders for the due regulation of her members, and penalties annexed to the breaches thereof.”*

“Now is there any thing in the nature of the church to guide us, as to what are ecclesiastical offences? Undoubtedly there is. In every society there must be such a principle; and, by reference to it in each, are formed laws for the government of each. Every society recognises peculiar offences, arising out of, and depending solely on, the peculiar nature of the society; so that in proportion as this latter is understood, the former are defined. Again, what becomes a crime, because violating the principle of one society, may be none in another, if, namely, it does not interfere with the object proposed in the formation and preservation of that other society.”†

8. Such was the power exercised by Mr. Wesley, who originated and arranged the rules and regulations he saw required to govern the societies committed by our Lord to his care, and he continued to exercise this power till his death; and since his death, the same power has been exercised by the Wesleyan preachers, under a constitution adopted to meet the necessities of the case; and the same power now resides in the General Conferences of the Methodist Church in the United States. In the “Minutes of several conversations” which Mr. Wesley had with his preachers, he gives an account of the origin of this power with him.

“Q. 27. What power is this which you exercise over both the preachers and the societies?

A. I love to do all things openly. I will therefore tell

* Lord King's Prim. Church, p. 105.

† Encyclopædia Metropolitana, vol. ii. p. 744.

you all I know of the matter, taking it from the very beginning.

(1.) In November, 1738, two or three persons who desired 'to flee from the wrath to come,' and then a few more came to me in London, and desired me to advise and pray with them. I said, 'If you will meet me on Thursday night, I will help you as well as I can.' More and more then desired to meet with them, till they were increased to many hundreds. The case was afterward the same at Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle, and many other parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland. It may be observed, the desire was on their part, not mine. My desire was to live and die in retirement. But I did not see that I could refuse them my help, and be guiltless before God. Here commenced my power; namely, a power to appoint when, and where, and how they should meet; and to remove those whose lives showed that they had not a desire 'to flee from the wrath to come.' And this power remained the same, whether the people meeting together were twelve, or twelve hundred, or twelve thousand.

(2.) In a few days some of them said, 'Sir, we will not sit under you for nothing, we will subscribe quarterly.' I said, 'I will have nothing; for I want nothing. My fellowship supplies me with all I want.' One replied, 'Nay, but you want a hundred and fifteen pounds to pay for the lease of the Foundry; and likewise a large sum of money to put it in repair.' On this consideration I suffered them to subscribe. And when the society met, I asked, 'Who will take the trouble of receiving this money, and paying it where it is needful?' One said, 'I will do it, and keep the account for you.' So here was the first steward. Afterward I desired one or two more to help me as stewards, and, in process of time, a greater number. Let it be remarked, it was I myself, not the people, who chose these stewards, and appointed to each the distinct work wherein he was to

help me, as long as I desired. And herein I began to exercise another sort of power; namely, that of appointing and removing stewards.

(3.) After a time, a young man, named Thomas Maxfield, came and desired to help me as a son in the gospel. Soon after came a second, Thomas Richards; and then a third, Thomas Westell. These severally desired to serve me as sons, and to labor when and where I should direct. Observe: these likewise desired me, not I them. But I durst not refuse their assistance. And here commenced my power to appoint each of these when, and where, and how to labor; that is, while he chose to continue with me. For each had a power to go away when he pleased; as I had also, to go away from them, or any of them, if I saw sufficient cause. The case continued the same when the number of preachers increased. I had just the same power still, to appoint when, and where, and how each should help me; and to tell any, (if I saw cause,) 'I do not desire your help any longer.' On these terms, and no other, we joined at first—on these we continue joined. But they do me no favor in being directed by me. It is true, my 'reward is with the Lord;' but at present I have nothing from it but trouble and care; and often a burden I scarce know how to bear.

(4.) In 1744, I wrote to several clergymen, and to all who then served me as sons in the gospel, desiring them to meet me in London, and to give me their advice concerning the best method of carrying on the work of God. And when their number increased, so that it was not convenient to invite them all, for several years I wrote to those with whom I desired to confer, and they only met me at London, or elsewhere; till at length I gave a general permission, which I afterward saw cause to retract. Observe: I myself sent for those of my own free choice. And I sent for them to advise, not to govern me. Neither did I at any time

divest myself of any part of the power above described, which the providence of God had cast upon me without any design or choice of mine.

(5.) What is that power? It is the power of admitting into, and excluding from, the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; of receiving or not receiving helpers; of appointing them when, where, and how to help me, and of desiring any of them to confer with me when I see good. And as it was merely in obedience to the providence of God, and for the good of the people, that I at first accepted this power, which I never sought, so it is on the same consideration, not for profit, honor, or pleasure, that I use it at this day.

(6.) But 'several gentlemen are offended at your having so much power.' I did not seek any part of it. But when it was come unawares, not daring to 'bury that talent,' I used it to the best of my judgment. Yet I never was fond of it. I always did, and do now, bear it as my burden;—the burden which God lays upon me, and therefore I dare not lay it down. But if you can tell me any one, or any five men, to whom I may transfer this burden, who will do just what I do now, I will heartily thank both them and you.

(7.) But some of our helpers say, 'This is shackling free-born Englishmen; and demand a free conference; that is, a meeting of all the preachers, wherein all things shall be determined by most votes. I answer, *it is possible, after my death, something of this kind may take place* ;*' but not while I live. To me the preachers have engaged themselves to submit to serve me as sons in the gospel; but they are not thus engaged to any man or number of men beside. To me the people in general will submit; but they will not

* Precisely the thing now done by the delegated General Conferences of the two great branches of the Methodist church in the United States.

thus submit to any other. It is nonsense, then, to call my using this power, 'shackling free-born Englishmen.' None needs to submit to it unless he will; so that there is no shackling in the case. Every preacher and every member may leave me when he pleases. But while he chooses to stay, it is on the same terms that he joined me at first.

'But this is making yourself a pope.' This carries no face of truth. The pope affirms that every Christian must do all he bids, and believe all he says, under pain of damnation. I never affirmed any thing that bears any the most distant resemblance to this. All I affirm is, the preachers who choose to labor with me, choose to serve me as sons in the gospel. And the people who choose to be under my care, choose to be so on the same terms they were at first. Therefore, all talk of this kind is highly injurious to me, who bear the burden merely for your sake. And it is exceedingly mischievous to the people, tending to confound their understanding, and fill their hearts with evil surmisings and unkind tempers toward me; to whom they really owe more for taking all this load upon me, for exercising this very power, for shackling myself in this manner, than for all my preaching put together, because preaching twice or thrice a day is no burden to me at all; but the care of all the preachers and all the people is a burden indeed."*

9. While the General Conference, as we have said, cannot assume legislative authority, in the strict sense of the term, it has, in the nature of things, power to make such prudential rules and regulations as shall be found necessary to enforce the laws of Christ, already enacted by him, the supreme Legislator. The rule on the subject of the classes was not enacted by the General Conference; it originated with Mr. Wesley in the government of the societies which

* Wesley's Works, vol. v. pp. 219-222.

he formed in the church of England, before there was a single Methodist in the United States. The General Conference found this rule existing, *and they would have destroyed the Methodist Church had they abolished it*; and, therefore, every person who joins the Methodist Church voluntarily assumes obligation to observe this regulation, and he is morally bound to do so. For every evangelical church has an *essential being* of its own, and hence there must be offices of authority, and some placed in authority, who shall govern the church. The recognition of offices and officers also evidently implies submission of the members to the rules and regulations which those in authority may see proper to adopt for their government. No society can exist without rules of some kind, and the adequate means of enforcing obedience to them. Consequently, the very constitution of the church by Christ and his apostles, implies that rules should be established, and the proper means provided, to enforce them—always in accordance with the written word of God. But how are we to know *what kind of government* was intended by Christ and his apostles? The nature of the church itself suggests what are moral offences; and if the church be truly evangelical, offences may be clearly determined by the letter and spirit of the Bible. And as the church has the authority to make rules and regulations for its own government not inconsistent with the Bible, and as authority and duty are reciprocal, it follows that compliance with such regulations must be a solemn duty.

All authority is given for the work of government. Authority is given to the ministry for the performance of their work; that is, a power to do their duty, and their work is to do the people good; and, therefore, their power is but authority to do the people good. The ministry are invested, as before stated, with authority to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and church discipline,

that they may do the people good ; and, therefore, if the people resist this authority, they place it out of the power of the ministry to do them good by preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and exercising church discipline. And, upon the principles on which we have established the authority of the ministry to make prudential regulations for the government of the church, it is as much the duty of Methodists to attend class meetings, as it is to come to the church to hear a sermon or receive the sacrament.

Some may object to this Methodistic *mode* of Christian communion, and urge that they are not under obligation to observe it, because it is not specified in the Scriptures. From the preceding argument, we reply, modes are binding on the church when they are ordained by the proper authorities in the church, provided they be not inconsistent with the word of God and the plain dictates of reason ; and hence, until the institution of the classes be abrogated, it is the duty of every Methodist to attend them. Private members have no right to substitute any other mode of Christian communion for this ; nor have the preachers themselves such a right, except in a legislative capacity.

CHAPTER III.

THE OBLIGATION OF CLASS MEETINGS FOUNDED UPON THEIR ESSENTIAL RELATION TO THE ITINERANT MINIS- TRY OF THE METHODIST CHURCH.

WE shall, in the first place, consider the nature of an itinerant ministry, and its advantages over a settled ministry; and, secondly, show the essential relation of our class-meeting system to our itinerancy.

The great distinguishing and prominent peculiarity of the Methodist ministry is its *itinerant* nature, a kind of ministry which conforms most strictly to the Bible, and so has advantages for doing the greatest amount of good, both to its own churches and the world at large. It is the most efficient system of ministry in the world to secure the great objects of preaching. Christ himself was the great Itinerant—"He *went about* doing good." Before his death, he commanded his disciples, "*As ye go, preach;*" and, after his death, he commanded them to "*Go into all the world, and preach his gospel to every creature.*" And all the apostles were itinerant preachers. Such is the character of the Methodist ministry, and such a ministry must be founded upon many and strong reasons, some of which we shall now mention :

1. It is adapted to the different constitutions of men, intellectual and moral. Argumentative preaching is suitable to logical minds; plain, pointed, practical preaching is suitable to others, who never stop to reason about the great truths of the Bible: some are convinced by the logic of Paul; some are roused by the thunders of Peter; some are

charmed by the eloquence of Apollos; some are subdued by the tender, sympathetic strains of John; others by the pathetic, flowing style of Barnabas; and as preachers are but men, our Lord chooses his ministers of every constitutional peculiarity, every taste, every sort of gifts, and every grade of talent, adapted to every sort of mind in the world. Thus, as every congregation is made up more or less of all these varieties, an itinerant ministry, in the course of a few years, supplies the wants of all; believers of every class are benefited, and sinners of every sort gathered into the church. Rarely, if ever, does a minister possess all these gifts in himself: no apostle possessed them all in himself: none but Christ combined them all in himself. An itinerant ministry, therefore, is a provision for the distribution of every order of gifts and talents which the wants of the church and the world require.

2. It is best adapted to frequent and powerful revivals. It is a fact of history, that the most frequent and extensive revivals have occurred under the preaching of itinerant ministers. Even among the settled ministry of other churches, the greater proportion of revivals occur under the labors of what are called "evangelists," who are indeed itinerant preachers; and in these churches, often when a change of ministers takes place, they are blessed with revival; and the inference is clear, if changes were more frequent among them,—that is, a nearer approximation were made to the Methodistic plan,—revivals would be more frequent among them; but now, it seldom happens that more than one revival of much power or extent occurs in the same church, except when the pastor is assisted by foreign aid, which is, in fact, an argument for the itinerancy. Where a minister is settled for an indefinite number of years, it is evident he can exert a controlling and beneficial influence only over those of his congregation to whom his preaching is specially adapted, and the rest must be co-

paratively unprofited, and, it may be, soon become indifferent, if not dissatisfied; for it is impossible for any preacher to please everybody; and, ordinarily, a suitable change must be made, or discord, division, and declension, will inevitably follow. Some men are revivalists, who ~~flash~~ conviction upon the understanding, and allure the affections; but these ordinarily are not the men who, like the logical Paul, analyze error, defend the great doctrines and institutions of the Bible, and expose the heresies and sophistries of the enemies of Christianity: the latter, the logical, are required by the church to confirm and establish the labors of the former, the revivalists; and the latter are required to prepare the experimental groundwork of the church for the ministrations of the former: neither class can be dispensed with, and both should be wisely and constantly distributed, which cannot be done unless the itinerant plan be adopted and impartially applied.

3. It is best adapted to the preservation of the purity and piety of the church. The labor, hardship, sacrifices, and frequent changes of an itinerant ministry are safeguards against the temptations to ease, idleness, affluence, and worldly fame to which a settled ministry are more directly exposed. The sojourn of an itinerant minister in one field of labor is so brief, that there is no inducement to him to form local associations, to enter upon permanent local enterprises, to originate or associate himself with parties, to foster pride, or confine his labors to a particular community. The itinerancy represses in the preachers the impulsion of worldly affections; requires the subordination of local prejudices and interests to the general good; subdues many jealousies and heart-burnings before they can assume a permanent and obstinate form; and quenches the fires of contention before they can disturb that reciprocal affection which should exist between the preachers and the people. It is a dangerous invasion of our itinerant plan, whenever a minister is con-

fined wholly to the best stations and circuits, or so localizes himself in secular arrangements and pursuits as to render it inconvenient, if not impossible, to assign him work where he is most needed: every preacher in the Methodist itinerancy should suppress, with unyielding firmness and invincible fortitude, the least disinclination to hardship and sacrifice involved in the work which may be impartially and wisely assigned him. If the purity and piety of the church can be preserved, and its prosperity promoted, in the best manner possible, by an itinerant ministry, surely the whole church should have a share in the best talents of the ministry. As these are the only legitimate objects of the ministry, especially an itinerant ministry, he has a very imperfect idea of his ministerial responsibility who considers himself degraded, or his dignity and talents disparaged, or feels aggrieved, by an appointment to a poor and humble field of labor. Disguise as we may, however, it is hard sometimes for flesh and blood to submit without complaining to such an appointment; and it must be conceded, also, that, occasionally, though not often, an appointment of this nature is injudiciously made; but, even in this case, "tribulation worketh patience, and patience *experience*, and *experience hope*." And so no particular church should endeavor to monopolize the best talents in the ministry to its use, or feel neglected when men of inferior intellectual abilities are assigned to its oversight. Indeed, it is an axiom of the itinerancy, if the best ministers be kept all the time upon the best stations and circuits, and men of the humblest abilities upon the poorest circuits and stations, progress will be comparatively slow throughout the whole bounds of the church and ministry, and a general declension in spirituality will inevitably follow, because such an arrangement is a violation of some of the fundamental principles of an itinerant ministry. The poorer fields of labor will be hereby deprived of the best talents of the ministry, and the richer

fields, overlooking the wants of the poorer classes, will substitute a splendid ministry and an imposing formality for simplicity and spirituality; and it is easy to see how such a ministry may, in time, yield insensibly to the insidious evil. And as to the ministers of humble abilities, nearly all hope of elevation is cut off effectually from them, by precluding opportunities to unfold and cultivate to much extent whatever of dormant talent or native power they may possess. No doubt there are many ministers in the background now, who, under more favorable circumstances, might have taken their position in the front ranks, and might this day be conspicuous leaders of our hosts, and able defenders of doctrinal and ecclesiastical Methodism, but who must now be content to spend the remainder of their lives in humble but honorable and useful toil, while many a popular minister will spend his days in the larger stations, substantially to but little purpose, who might, in strict harmony with the itinerancy, have crowded his life with incalculable and varied usefulness to the church.

4. It is best adapted to the preservation of a faithful ministry. Not dependent upon the people for a "call," knowing that his sojourn in any one place can be but for a definite and brief period, and that his salary is defined by the constitution of his church, the Methodist itinerant preacher is defended against the temptation to preach to please the people, and is enabled to speak the truth boldly and fearlessly, and do all the work of his ministry faithfully, without the fear of offending any, in or out of the church. Indeed, he knows the more faithful he is in the discharge of all his duties, and the more strictly he conforms to the requirements of the itinerancy, the more he will be respected by the delinquent and disobedient, the more he will be beloved by the faithful portion of the church, the more cordially he will be welcomed by new fields of labor, the more he will be admired by his brethren in the ministry, the

more rapidly he will promote both his own spirituality and that of his charges, and the more certainly he will obtain a temporal support. But, where the selection of pastors, and the time of pastoral oversight depend upon the will of the people,* how difficult must it be for the pastor to be faithful in all respects! Intrepid truly must he be, who, every moment exposed to the caprice of the people, and threatened with dismission, yet fearlessly discharges all the business of his solemn and responsible office. Rare, indeed, are such examples in a settled ministry. And this may be some explanation of the painful neglect of the administration of discipline in many churches under the care of a settled ministry. It is to be regretted, however, that even under our own itinerant ministry, in many places, the administration of discipline is lamentably neglected, and the ambition to please the people predominates over the desire to do them good: which is but another proof that the best system of church-government is not sufficient of itself to preserve a faithful ministry, and accomplish all the ends of preaching. Nevertheless, the advantages of our itinerant plan are obvious, and the path to success is plain, open, and unembarrassed.

5. It is best adapted to the wants of feeble societies and destitute portions of the work. Thus, many feeble societies are associated with a few strong ones, and formed into a

* "It is well known, that the itinerant plan of preaching has always been considered as a fundamental principle in the economy of Methodism. It has been owned and blessed of God in a most remarkable manner. Originating with Christ and his apostles, it has been proved to be the most efficacious means for propagating the gospel that, under God, has ever blessed the world from the commencement of the Christian era to the present hour. To preserve this plan from violation, it is obvious that the stationing of the preachers must ultimately rest with the preachers themselves. For if the people have a right to dictate or appoint, all will choose men of superior talents; all will reject those of weak ones; contending parties will instantly be formed; and the whole connection will degenerate into factions."—Drew's Life of Coke, p. 44.

circuit; and a preacher is appointed to the oversight of all; and he is required to give all the societies equal attention, though he obtains his support mainly from the strong and wealthy classes, while the feeble ones contribute scarcely any thing, and often nothing at all. Soon the feeble societies are blessed with revivals, and become strong; and now the circuit may be divided, and new circuits be formed, and so the general work be enlarged. And so, also, places wholly destitute may be supplied with preaching, and new societies soon organized, and new circuits, like magic, spring into being. Thus Methodism supplies the interior intervals, expands with the frontiers of civilization, and is capable, we believe, of banding the world with the bonds of the gospel. "The usual stationary ministry waits for the call of the people, while the Methodist ministry goes forth to call the people." Why? Because the great mass of mankind are too poor to call and support the ministry; and it is one of the chief glories of Methodism, that through her ministry "*the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" The poor, when converted, in time become rich, and thus send the gospel to other poor; and so Methodism is practically self-supporting, and contains in itself the elements of reproduction and propagation corresponding to the wants of the human race. Like the famous banian-tree of the East—

"Such as at this day to Indians known,
In Malabar, or Deccan, spreads her arms,
Branching so broad and long, that in the ground
The bending twigs take root, and daughters grow
About the mother-tree, a pillar'd shade
High overarch'd."

The itinerancy is the cheapest, as well as the most efficient, method of preaching the gospel among men. It is a divine method, best adapted to supplying the whole church and the world with pastoral care. We would not have the pastoral relation permanent, because then, as in other churches, many

fields of labor would often be left " destitute ;" on the contrary, now a Methodist church is never without a pastor, nor a Methodist pastor without a charge ; and in case of death, or suspension, or failure to accept the work allotted, the vacancy is soon supplied. Go where he will in this world, in which mankind have been jostling one another about since creation, he will find those who will simultaneously recognise the truth and authority of his faithful ministrations. He will find the same sweet moon, the same glorious sun, the same bright stars, the same ambient atmosphere, the same refreshing waters, the same God and Governor, and the same great work to do. When asked, where is his country, like Anaxagoras, let him point his finger to the heavens, and tell the people he has come to establish the kingdom of God among them. Let him point to the kingdoms founded and victories achieved by their great, men and tell them, he has come to found a greater kingdom among them, and to lead them to greater victories over themselves, the world, and death, and hell.

Secondly, the essential relation of the classes to the pastoral care of the Methodist ministry, which is itinerant. Voluntary and habitual neglect of class meeting is a virtual, though not a formal, withdrawal from the pastoral care of this ministry. It is a quiet way to withdraw from the Methodist Church. Every class is an integral part of our church, which is made up of classes ; and to neglect class altogether is to withdraw, at least in part, from the pastoral care of the Methodist ministry—as much so as if there were but one class of Methodists in the world, and any one of its members should never meet with that class. From a sense of duty, and with a view to enjoy the privileges of this church, whenever any one joins it, he solemnly and formally pledges himself to meet, when it is practicable, with the class to which he is attached ; and not to meet, is not only to violate his obligation, but voluntarily to waive the privileges of the

class meeting. It is more than this: it is to forfeit his right to all other privileges of association with this church, such as the sacrament, the love-feast, and pastoral oversight, as we shall now endeavor to show.

We have said that the Methodist Church is made up of classes, and to belong to one of the classes is to belong to this church; and if there were but one class of the kind in the world, that class would be the Methodist Church, and to join that class would be to join the Methodist Church, and to leave that class would be to leave the Methodist Church. A consideration of the origin of the classes will prove this. The origin of the classes is thus related by Mr. Wesley. When Mr. Wesley and his brother Charles, amid the surrounding darkness,* began to preach true Christianity,

* The state of religion in England, when Mr. Wesley commenced his laborious and glorious ministry, was deplorable in the extreme. "The great majority of the lower classes were ignorant of the art of reading, and in many places were semi-barbarous in their manners. A lifeless formality, a haughty dislike of the spiritualities of religion, or a sneering contempt of them, and a flood of licentiousness and impiety had swept away almost every barrier that had been raised in the public mind by the labors of former ages. Infidelity began its ravages upon the principles of the higher and middle classes; the mass of the people remained uneducated, and were Christians but in name and by virtue of their baptism; while many of the great doctrines of the Reformation were banished both from the universities and the pulpits. Archbishop Leighton complains that his 'church was a fair carcass without a spirit,' and Burnet observes, that in his time 'the clergy had less authority, and were more in contempt, than those of any church in Europe; for they were much the most remiss in their labors, and the less severe in their lives.' Though in the English church there were men unsurpassed in erudition, in eloquence, or in strength and subtlety of mind, yet they reduced her liturgy, her articles, and her homilies to a dead form, which was repeated without thought, or so explained as to take away their meaning; and a great proportion of the clergy, whatever learning they might possess, were grossly ignorant of theology, and contented themselves with reading short, unmeaning sermons, purchased or pilfered, and formed upon the lifeless theological system of the day. The prevalent

and many were awakened, "one, and another, and another came to us," says he, "asking what they should do, being distressed on every side; as every one strove to weaken, and none to strengthen their hands in God, we advised them, 'Strengthen you one another.' Talk together as often as you can, and pray earnestly with and for one another, that you may 'endure unto the end, and be saved.' Against this advice we presumed there could be no objection, as being grounded on the plainest reason, and in so many scriptures, both of the Old Testament and New, that it would be tedious to recite them. They said, 'But we want you likewise to talk with us often, to direct and quicken us in our way, to give us the advices which you well know we need, and to pray with us as well as for us.' I asked, Which of you desire this? Let me know your names and places of abode. They did so. But I soon found they were too many for me to talk with severally so often as they wanted it. So I told them, 'If you will all of you come together every Thursday, in the evening, I will gladly spend

divinity was Pelagian, or what very nearly approached it. Natural religion was the great subject of study, when theology was studied at all, and was made the standard of revealed truth. The doctrine of the *opus operatum* of the papists, as to sacraments, was the faith of the divines of the older school; and a refined system of ethics, unconnected with Christian motives, and disjoined from the vital principles of religion in the heart, was the favorite theory of the modern. The body of the clergy neither knew nor cared about systems of any kind. In a greater number of instances they were negligent and immoral, often grossly so. The populace in the large towns were ignorant and profligate; and the inhabitants of villages added to ignorance and profligacy brutish and barbarous manners. A more striking instance of the rapid deterioration of religious light and influence in a country scarcely occurs than in our own, from the Restoration till the rise of Methodism. There were indeed many happy exceptions; but this was the general state of religion and morals in the country, when the Wesleys, Whitefield, and a few hundred spirits came forth, ready to sacrifice ease, reputation, and even life itself, to produce a reformation." This dark picture of the times is drawn by Mr. Richard Watson, in his Life of Wesley, pp. 59, 62.

some time with you in prayer, and give you the best advice I can.' Thus arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterward called *a society*; a very innocent name, and very common in London, for any number of people associating themselves together. The thing proposed in their associating themselves together was very obvious to every one. They wanted to 'flee from the wrath to come,' and to assist each other in so doing. They therefore united themselves 'in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.' Upon reflection, I could not but observe, This is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times, those whom God had sent forth 'preached the gospel to every creature.' And the *oi akroatai*, 'the body of hearers,' were mostly either Jews or heathens. But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these *catechoumenoī*, 'catechumens,' (as they were then called,) apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them and for them, according to their several necessities."*

Here is the history of the origin of *societies* in the Methodist Church, or rather the origin of the Methodist Church itself; and these societies are founded upon the plainest reason, Scripture, and the practice of the apostles and primitive teachers of the gospel. We have seen, that persons awakened and converted under the preaching of Mr. Wesley and his brother, *voluntarily* placed themselves under their pastoral charge, and were associated in *societies*, under certain specific rules and regulations, and with objects

* Wesley's Works, vol. v. pp. 177, 178.

wholly religious. But we have also seen, in another part of this treatise, that because of the *itinerant* nature of the Wesleyan ministry, the societies could not receive the pastoral care they required, and that therefore the *societies* were divided into smaller companies, called *classes*, which were placed under the charge of leaders, selected and appointed by Mr. Wesley to aid him in his pastoral work. Consequently, the classes were but integral parts of the societies or churches founded and organized by Mr. Wesley and the Wesleyan preachers; and to withdraw from these classes, that is, to fail to meet with them, was to withdraw from the pastoral charge of the Methodist ministry and the care of the leaders, and so to forfeit all right to all the privileges of the Methodist Church. This is precisely the case with all probationers and members of the Methodist Church in the present day, and must continue to be so as long as the present system of the class meetings is retained in the constitution of the Methodist Church. And until the system can be proved to be irrational and unscriptural, obligation to attend class, as far as practicable, must remain in full and original force upon all members of the Methodist Church. This obligation is solemnly assumed by *Methodists*, and no one can wilfully and habitually violate it without ceasing to be Methodists. It is a specific form of obligation, voluntarily assumed, and no one who has so assumed it can violate it without losing the specific character of a Methodist.

It is not pretended that no one can be a Christian without meeting in class, for there are many exemplary Christians in other churches who never met in class; but it is assumed, that no one can be a *Methodist* without attending to this essential institution of our church. And it is very questionable, from the nature and objects of class meeting, whether any member of our church, who is in the wilful and repeated neglect of his class, can, in the proper sense,

continue long a Christian. He may have the form of godliness in other respects, and may be sound in his views of our theological doctrines, and be an advocate of our usages in all other respects, but yet he manifests a destitution of those religious desires and that spiritual character which the class meeting was originally created to improve and mature. Upon a fair and impartial investigation, this remark will be found to be true without scarcely an exception. Nor is it doubted that an exalted morality, a charming amiability of disposition, an attractive loveliness of character, a blandness of manners, a sterling integrity, and every natural virtue, in social, public, and private life, and even a semblance of piety, may be displayed without ever meeting in class; but that any member of the Methodist Church can wilfully and habitually, that is, without good and sufficient reasons, fail to observe this means of grace, and yet know any thing of real and permanent spiritual life, or be sensible of the presence or the progress of real godliness, is very questionable. The best evidence is wanting—that which in Methodism not only evinces a truly spiritual nature, but is designed to regulate, advance, and perfect that nature. Nor is it pretended that no one can be truly awakened and deeply serious without attending to this means of grace, for many are so, and obtain religion in other churches; but it is assumed, that none such, who are probationers in our church, and, as above, neglect the class meeting, can long remain serious, or fail soon to relapse into worse than their former insensibility. Nor is it pretended that any one who has habitually enjoyed this means of grace for some length of time, but who occasionally yields to temptation, and so neglects to meet with his class, thereby loses all spiritual life; but it is affirmed that all such, by an occasional attendance only, will gradually lose ground, and by an entire neglect will be deprived of spiritual enjoyment altogether.

The class meeting is the principal Methodistic test of re-

ligious character. Experimental religion is the only ground of right to association with the spiritual church of God.* The destitution of holiness, of spiritual life, or of strenuous efforts to obtain it, is a disciplinable offence. Discipline looks beyond a mere form and profession of religion. The church is bound, by her very nature and objects, to insist on pure experimental religion as essential to right of association with her and enjoyment of her privileges. From the *itinerant* character of the Methodist ministry, the class meeting is the only institution of the church by which the pastor can clearly and satisfactorily determine the spirituality of his flock; and this is done, not only by his personal examination of the classes as often as possible, but by the representation of the leaders who have visited the classes in his absence. Discontinue, abolish, or permit the class-meeting system to sink into neglect, and the pastor has but little means left by which to obtain knowledge of the spiritual condition of his people. Hence arises the duty of each member of our church to attend, as far as practicable, this means of grace; and it is the duty of the pastor and the leaders to see that this be done.

A member of the church, we have said, may perform all the moral duties of Christianity; but this is not enough: this may be nothing more than morality, the fruit of initial grace. And he may also observe the ordinary services of formal Christianity, such as the sacrament, preaching, public worship, private prayer, reading the Bible, the weekly prayer-meeting, and other formal services; but this is not enough: this may be nothing more than formality, the work of a formal profession. Something more is required to entitle one to association with the invisible body of Christ, the church, and qualify him for the kingdom of heaven; and

* Serious or awakened persons may be received and continued on probation.

that is, a new, spiritual, and holy nature, a life hid with Christ in God, a love, a joy, a peace in the Holy Ghost, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a conformity in heart to Christ, the transforming power of divine grace, an experimental knowledge of spiritual things, deep and intimate communion with God, a deadness to the world, a pure and warm love for the brethren, an exercise of the affections on things above, a pressing on to perfection, a cultivation and practical exercise of all the Christian graces; in a word, "all the fulness of God." Now we affirm, under the constitution of an *itinerant* ministry, such as ours is, it is impossible for the pastor to understand ordinarily* the state of his flock in these respects, without the use of the class meeting, and the aid of the class-leaders; and hence the obligation and wisdom of the class meeting as a test of membership.

And hence habitual and wilful neglect to meet in class is, generally, a sufficient ground for expulsion from the church. This was the judgment of Mr. Wesley. No statement is capable of stronger proof than this. "I preached," says he, "at Waywick about one, and then rode quietly to Bristol. I examined the society the following week, leaving out every careless person, and every one who wilfully and obstinately refused to meet his brethren weekly. By this means their number was reduced from nine hundred to about seven hundred and thirty."† On this subject he wrote to Rev. Joseph Benson, one of his favorite and most efficient preachers, as follows :

* We say ordinarily; for cases of gross immorality might come to the knowledge of the pastor without the aid of the leader; but many instances of neglect of religious duties, declension in piety, entire backsliding, and utter unfruitfulness, might long remain in the church without his knowledge, or come to his knowledge too late for him to render them assistance, or guard the church against scandal and injury of their union with her, or never come to his knowledge at all.

† Wesley's Works, vol. iii. p. 440.

"NEAR LONDON, Feb. 22, 1776.

DEAR JOSEPH:—We must threaten no longer, but perform. In November last, I told the London society, 'Our rule is, to meet a class once a week, not once in two or three. I now give you warning: I will give tickets to none in February, but those that have done this.' I have stood to my word. Go you and do likewise, wherever you visit the classes. Begin, if need be, at Newcastle, and go on at Sunderland. Promises to meet are now out of date. Those that have not met seven times in the quarter, exclude. Read their names in the society; and inform them all, you will the next quarter exclude all that have not met twelve times: that is, unless they were hindered by distance, sickness, or by some unavoidable business. And I pray, without fear or favor, remove the leaders, whether of classes or bands, who do not watch over the souls committed to their care 'as those that must give account.'

I am, dear Joseph,

Yours affectionately,

JOHN WESLEY.**

Again: "How dare any man deny this (the class meeting) to be (as to the *substance* of it) a means of grace, ordained of God?"† After these plain and unequivocal statements, who can doubt whether Mr. Wesley regarded the regular observance of the class meeting as a condition of membership? But this is not all.

The same is most clearly implied in the object of the institution of classes, as it is stated by Mr. Wesley, in "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies," which he wrote himself. "That it may *the more easily be discerned* whether they *are indeed working out their own salvation*, each society is divided into smaller companies, called *classes*, according to their respective places of abode.

* Wesley's Works, vol. vii. p. 76.

† Ibid., vol. iii. p. 127.

There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled *the leader*.* Here the object is set forth. And the duty of the leader proves the same thing. "It is his business," Mr. Wesley continues, "(1.) To see each person in his class once a week, at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require."† And again, same page: "(2.) To inform the minister of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved." The same language is contained in our Discipline.‡ If such be the design of the classes, and such the duties of the leaders, can any one doubt that the observance of this means of grace is a condition of membership, or that any who wholly disregard its design, by wilful and repeated neglect, should be excluded from the church? An institution without an object is an absurdity; an office without duties is an absurdity; and to allow neglect or violation of a law with impunity is to divest the law of all authority. The violation of a law is an offence committed against its whole force, and consequently merits a forfeiture of the interests protected by the law. Wilful and habitual failure to meet class is a practical denial of the right of the preacher to pastoral oversight, because it is a withdrawal from the spiritual care of the leader, who is a regularly appointed helper of the pastor. The nature and design of class meetings, the office and duties of the leaders, and, by consequence, the pastoral authority of the preacher, are thus all at a single stroke virtually regarded as nullities in the constitution of our church; and who can for a moment question whether an offence of this kind does not justly disfranchise the offender? More than this: it is an offence committed against the whole church, since every member of the church owes his influence to the church; but this is

* Wesley's Works, vol. v. p. 190.

† Ibid., p. 191.

‡ Discipline, 1854, pp. 28, 29.

a withdrawal of his influence, in a great degree, from the church. Nor is this all: it is an offence committed against God himself, since every member of the church is under allegiance to God; but this is a violation of allegiance to God, who alone is the head of the church. And, finally: it is an offence committed against the individual himself, since, being associated with the church, he has a right to all its privileges; but this is a wilful and repeated repudiation of the invaluable privileges of the class meeting, a prominent institution of the church. Though no outward immorality whatever be committed, all these elements enter into the offence under consideration; and such an offence is a sufficient ground of exclusion from the *Methodist* church, which has adopted the *class meeting* as the rule or regulation, in harmony with its *itinerant* character, by which alone the spirituality of its members can be fully determined.

CHAPTER IV

OBLIGATION OF CLASS MEETINGS DEDUCIBLE FROM THEIR ESSENTIAL RELATION TO THE WHOLE METHODISTIC ECONOMY.

LET the classes be disbanded, and the Methodist Church is dissolved. Let this institution be abolished, and Itinerancy, the glory of constitutional Methodism, is powerless, and must soon be exchanged for some other method of preserving and superintending the church. With the abrogation of the Itinerancy, the Episcopacy, as it exists in our church, must also be abolished ; and then the people will select their own pastors. Let this institution be abolished, and the great connectional principles of Methodism are destroyed, and our church must be divided into separate and independent churches, and assume some new or old form of congregationalism. Let this institution be abolished, and Annual Conférences, as they are now constituted, must undergo such serious modifications as to lose almost entirely their character as truly pastoral. The General Conference, consequently, must also undergo corresponding alterations, equally subversive of primitive Methodism. Let this institution be abolished, and to the extent that every other institution of Methodism is essentially connected with the classes must Methodism undergo material changes. Thus a new financial system must be devised and adopted to support the preachers, as is now to some extent applied in pew-churches. The ministry must devise some other method to ascertain the spiritual condition of the churches under their care. Some other method must be devised to receive probationers,

and prepare them for full membership ; to promote the spirituality of those who are in the church, and prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the church. Some other mode of recommending suitable candidates to the Quarterly Conference for license to preach must be devised, for this is done now by the classes or the leaders ; and that, too, because if a leader be a candidate for license to preach, it is presumable that his class or the leaders are best qualified to judge of his merits. And so the influence and strength of the Quarterly Conference would be greatly abridged, since it is now composed principally of leaders, and the principal link between the Quarterly Conference and the membership would be severed ; and on the circuits particularly, unless some new method were devised, it would be impossible to represent and superintend properly all the interests of the church. Next would follow the almost entire disruption of the bond existing between the Quarterly Conference and the Annual Conference, at least in two most important particulars : namely, in cases of appeal, and recommendation to join the travelling connection, unless some other regulation to accomplish these ends were adopted. And when these extensive innovations should have been effected, but little would remain of our present constitution worthy of consideration or preservation. The energy, efficiency, and glory of primitive Methodism then will have departed—the majestic edifice soon to sink into the dust, and perish from the earth.

CHAPTER V.

OBLIGATION OF CLASS MEETINGS DEDUCIBLE FROM THEIR DESIGN.

THE obligation of the class meeting is most clearly deducible from its design. The design of the institution is plainly set forth in the "General Rules," and to them we invite particular attention. They were adopted originally, we have seen, for the government of the "UNITED SOCIETY, first in Europe, and then in America," which "is no other than '*a company of men* having the form and seeking the power of *godliness*, *united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.*'" * These, then, were the great objects of the formation of the Methodist Church from the beginning. And that it might be discerned whether each society was accomplishing these objects, it was divided into classes, and a leader appointed to each, with certain duties prescribed. For it is added: "(3.) That it may the more easily be discerned, whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled *the leader*." The very design of the division of the church into classes, then, is that they may pray together, receive the word of exhortation, watch over one another in love, and help each other to work out their salvation, and ascertain whether each is in-

* Discipline, 1854, p. 28.

deed working out his salvation. But how can this design be accomplished, or how can it be ascertained who are, and who are not, working out their own salvation, if the class meeting be neglected? That is, how can they *pray together, receive the word of exhortation, watch over one another, and help each other to work out their salvation, and ascertain who are indeed doing this, unless they meet together in class?* If any fail, therefore, to meet in class with his brethren, it is evident that he is not "seeking the power of godliness;" that he is neither receiving spiritual help himself, nor extending it to others; and that, as a Methodist, he is not working out his own salvation. He, therefore, has no longer any right to association with the Methodist Church. Any longer association with the church would be merely nominal—would be the same as if he did not belong to the church at all.

The same conclusion is deducible from a consideration of the duties of the leader. It is his duty "to see each person in his class once a week at least"**—either at the class or at his home. But how can this be done in the case of those who neglect to meet in class? or why should the leader continue to meet such at their homes, who nevertheless continue wilfully and repeatedly to neglect their class? It is as much the duty of the members to meet their leader, as it is his duty to meet them in class. And their wilful and repeated neglect to do so, renders it impossible for him to meet them in class, and unnecessary for him to visit them at their homes. That is, he cannot "inquire how their souls prosper," nor "advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require," nor "inform the minister of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved :" since they hold themselves inaccessible to his care, and remove themselves beyond his knowledge.

* Discipline, 1854, p. 28.

The same conclusion is deducible from the condition of admission into the societies, which is stated in the following terms: “(4.) There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies—‘a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.’ But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, first, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind;”—and many things are specified as prohibited; and “secondly, by doing good;”—and many are specified as enjoined; and “thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God;”—and several are mentioned as required.* But how can it be known that this “desire is really fixed in the soul?” how can “evidence” be obtained that the members of our church, or probationers in it, “continue to desire salvation,” unless they meet in class? How, ordinarily, can it be known, for example, that any are guilty of “taking the name of God in vain,” or of “profaning the day of the Lord,” or of “drunkenness,” or of “fighting, quarreling, brawling,” &c., or of “uncharitable or unprofitable conversation,” or of “*putting on of gold and costly apparel*,” or of “*taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus*,” or of “*laying up treasure upon earth*,” unless there be some one, as the leader, whose duty it is to look after the outward conduct of the people, and some suitable means, as the class meeting, through which, upon inquiry, he obtains the knowledge of these things? And so, ordinarily, how can it be known that any are “doing good of every possible sort,” or are using “all possible *diligence and frugality*,” or are “running with patience the race which is set before them—are *denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily*; submitting to

* Discipline, 1854, pp. 29-33.

bear the reproach of Christ," &c., unless these things are made subjects of faithful investigation by the class-leader, in his intercourse with his members in the class-room, or in his observation of their outward and daily walk? Or how, ordinarily, can it be known that any attend upon "the ministry of the word," or "the Lord's supper," or "family and private prayer," or "searching the Scriptures," or "fasting and abstinence," unless these things be made subjects of special inquiry in the class-room, or in the visits of the leader to the members of his class?

The same conclusion is deducible from the concluding paragraph of the General Rules: "(7) These are the general rules of our societies: all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul, as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But if then he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have deliveredd our own souls."* It is in the class meeting, ordinarily, that it is discovered who "observe not" these rules, or "who habitually break any of them;" and such are to be reported to the pastor, who is to "admonish" and "bear with them for a season," and "then, if they repent not," they "have no more a place among us,"—they are to be expelled from the church according to the Discipline.

The obligation of class meetings is deducible from their design in another repeat, viz., the accomplishment, through them, of the great objects of the Methodist Church and ministry.

* Discipline, 1854, pp. 33, 34.

1. It is the duty of the Methodist ministry to ascertain, as far as possible, the spiritual state and conduct of those under their care: consequently, they are invested with authority to adopt the most suitable measures to accomplish this object. Therefore, those under their care are under obligation to observe such measures. Again and again we have shown that the class meeting is a regulation the most suitable, yea, is indispensable, to accomplish the objects of an *itinerant* ministry; and hence the Methodist ministry have a right to require those under their care to observe this regulation, and those under their care are under obligation to do it. Without a knowledge of their people, the ministry cannot discharge their duty to them; and without the class meeting the Methodist ministry cannot obtain this knowledge; and, therefore, without the class meeting the Methodist ministry cannot discharge their duty to their people. Ministerial obligation, if nothing more, demands the imposition and enforcement of the class meeting as a regulation of church-government and a test of membership. If a member wilfully and habitually neglects his class, he voluntarily and actually places himself beyond the oversight of his minister, and the minister is of necessity compelled to regard him as worthy of being formally removed from his pastoral care. If he fail to do this, he does not discharge his duty, and he must then have those nominally under his oversight to whom he *cannot* extend the proper care: he has now no access to them; they are really sheep without a shepherd, and he is, in fact, a shepherd without sheep. He, therefore, is under the most solemn obligation to require of his charge the observance of the class meeting, that he may discharge his duty to them as pastor; and they are under a similar obligation to observe it, that they may discharge their duty to him as the flock of Christ. To be under solemnly imposed and acknowledged responsibility, in circumstances voluntarily allowed, in which it is impossible

to discharge it, is surely a very grave and serious matter to any one; but for a Methodist minister to be in charge of, and responsible for, a church of Christ, of whom he knows but little, and can know but little, so long as he permits them to neglect, wilfully and repeatedly, the only means through which he can acquire a proper knowledge of their spiritual state and conduct, is a matter of incalculable concern both to him and them. How can he render an acceptable account to God? How can he render a just and acceptable account of a people of whom he was comparatively ignorant, and of whom he was content to be ignorant, and whom he nevertheless recognised and encouraged as the people of God? And how can such a people render an acceptable account to God for having wilfully and habitually withheld themselves, by neglect of class meetings, from the knowledge of their pastors, whom they nevertheless acknowledged as their pastors, and to whom they should have looked for spiritual comfort and direction? May the Lord pardon our sins in these solemn matters, and may we do better as pastors and people in future!

2. Without the class meeting, the members of the church cannot discharge certain religious duties to one another. Christians are commanded to "bear one another's burdens;" the "strong to bear the infirmities of the weak;" to "heal the lame;" to "restore, in the spirit of meekness, those overtaken in a fault;" to "strengthen the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees;" to "weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice;" to "exhort, rebuke, and admonish;" and mark such as "walk disorderly," and "cause divisions." But all this cannot be done without a knowledge of one another; and, as Methodists, without the class meeting, we can have but an imperfect knowledge of one another in these respects; and hence, wherever the class meeting is generally neglected by a church, the members cannot properly discharge their duties

to one another. Hence, for want of this mutual help, in some places our churches advance so slowly, and in other places decline. It is needless to affirm that other Christian denominations have not the class meeting, and yet they discharge these Christian duties. We still maintain that unless the members of other Christian denominations observe some method substantially like the class meeting, or that accomplishes the object of the class meeting, they cannot obtain the proper knowledge of one another, and so cannot reciprocally discharge their duties. Let every Methodist, therefore, for the sake of, and from his relation to, his brethren, discharge his responsibility in these particulars by a faithful observance of the class meeting. The common spiritual good of his class demands it. God commands it. The Bible enjoins it. The church requires it. What ! brother, sister, nothing to do for others ? and doing nothing for others ? and receiving no good from others ? Of what use are you, then, to the church ? Of what use is the church to you ? It is a blank to you, and you to it. These are solemn inquiries to one who is professionally a member of "the body of Christ," which is the church. By as much as these duties of mutual help are sacred and important, and are enjoined in the Bible, and the class meeting is the only means through which, as Methodists, we can obtain the knowledge of one another required to discharge them, is it the duty of Methodists to attend class meetings ; and by so much is culpability incurred by any who deliberately and repeatedly neglect to do it. The more prolonged the neglect, the more accumulated the guilt ; the more general the neglect, the more extensive the evil results. Our churches, neglecting class meetings, may be blessed with revivals, but they will gradually decline in extent and power, because they will have become too weak to *take care* of the converts, since their individual members had *not taken care of one another*. The spiritual ligaments

of the members of the Methodist Church are the classes, which Mr. Wesley called "The *sinews* of the Methodist Church." Sever these, and our church crumbles to pieces. May God strengthen and tighten these bonds, that we may be indissolubly one, as Christ and the Father are one, and that we may be a name, and a praise to God, and a blessing to each other and to the world !

CHAPTER VI.

OBLIGATION OF CLASS MEETINGS EXPLICITLY EXPRESSED IN THE DISCIPLINE.

THE obligation of class meetings, as a test of membership, is clearly and explicitly expressed in our discipline.

“ *Quest.* 1. What shall we do with those members of our church who wilfully and repeatedly neglect to meet their class ?

Ans. 1. Let the elder, deacon, or one of the preachers visit them, whenever it is practicable, and explain to them the consequence if they continue to neglect, *viz.*, exclusion.

If they do not amend, let him who has the charge of the circuit or station bring their case before the society, or a select number, before whom they shall have been cited to appear : and if they be found guilty of wilful neglect by the decision of a majority of the members before whom their case is brought, let them be laid aside, and let the preacher show that they are excluded for a breach of our rules, and not for immoral conduct.”*

Wilful and repeated neglect of class meeting is here as clearly stated as sufficient cause for expulsion, as immorality or crime is, in other parts of the Discipline ; only a distinction is made between it and immoral conduct from a tender regard to the feelings and reputation of the offender. No duty is more clearly set forth in the constitution of the Methodist Church as a test of membership than is the observance of class meeting. The most violent construction

* Discipline, 1854, pp. 122, 123.

of the rule on the subject cannot set aside this plain meaning. Every case of "wilful and repeated neglect" is arraignable under positive law. And "let no one, under a mistaken notion of improving Methodism, seek to have this *test of membership* done away, unless he prefers careless and worldly-minded professors of religion to the living stones of the temple of God."*

The obligation, as a test of membership, of the class meeting, is also most clearly expressed in the section of our Discipline on the "reception of members into the church." It is asked, "How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the church?" And it is answered, "*3. Let none be received into the church until they are recommended by a leader with whom they have met at least six months on trial, and shall give satisfactory assurances of their willingness to observe and keep the rules of the church.*"† What is here made conditional of reception into the church, must be conditional of continuance in the church; and what is designed to prevent "improper persons from insinuating themselves into the church," must be designed to exclude "improper persons" from the church. Neglect to meet in class at least six months, is made the ground of rejection by the church; and neglect to meet in class is as good ground to exclude any from the church. The reason is the same in both cases: if it be waived in the latter, it should be in the former. If none should be excluded from the church for neglect of class meeting, none should be denied admission into the church for its neglect. That which is made the test of Christian character and of right to reception into the church, is made the test of Christian character and of right to continuance in the church. Therefore, the class meeting is as much a test of member-

* Bishop Morris: *Introduction to "Miley on Class Meetings,"* p. 21.

† *Discipline, 1854, pp. 96, 97.*

ship as it is a test of probation. No one, according to our church polity, has a right to the privileges of church membership who is not a Christian, or seeking to be a Christian; and the class meeting is the test whether he is such, or seeking to be such.

CHAPTER VII.

OBLIGATION OF CLASS MEETINGS FOUNDED UPON THE SOCIAL COMPACT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH.

THE obligation of class meetings, as a test of membership, is *voluntarily* assumed by all who join the Methodist Church. Matters that may not be prescribed by positive law, but which are conducive to the peace and order of a church, are proper subjects of incorporation into the polity of the church; and it is in the power of the lawful authority in the church to determine such things. That may be lawfully commanded which is in itself lawful, or may be lawfully done. Now, granting, which we have done, that the class meeting is not specifically enjoined in the Bible, yet it may be lawfully ordained by those in authority in our church as essential to the peace and order of our church, because it is substantially contained in the Bible. And it follows, that men may yield to the restraint of their Christian liberty in this, and all other matters substantially scriptural, that may be enacted and enjoined by lawful authority in the church, as essential to its peace and order. That is, though the class meeting is imposed as a thing in itself lawful, and conducive to the peace, order, and prosperity of the Methodist Church, no one is to be held responsible to observe it until he so far yield his Christian liberty as voluntarily to assume the obligation to do so. Then observance of the class meeting becomes a test of membership to him, because he obligates himself to do what the lawful authority in the church enjoins, and what it is lawful to enjoin; and it is lawful to be done, because concurrent with the written word of God. If

the class meeting were intrinsically evil, or circumstantially conflicting with the peace and order of the church, no authority in the church could make the observance of it lawful: but no one acquainted with the institution will assert these of it. In other words, where one unites himself with the Methodist Church, he voluntarily consents to observe the class meeting as an institution ordained as essential to its peace and order; therefore, when he refuses to observe it, he opposes himself to its peace and order, and so should not be allowed longer to continue in its membership: he has violated his obligation, and exclusion is the just penalty. The only objection that can be made to this argument is, that the observance of class meeting is not essential to the peace and order of our church, which no one will make who understands the constitution of our church. It is not assumed, but denied, that the lawful authority in the church can impose any thing for its peace and order which is in opposition to reason and evidence brought from the Scripture; for no man has lawful power over his own conscience, much less can others exercise such-power.* God alone can exercise this power. And therefore, where the lawful authority in the church imposes any thing consistent with the written word, and any one joins the church believing that which is imposed is in accordance with the written word, he is bound to comply with it. In other words, neither the governors in the church nor private members are to judge of what is lawful and binding, and what not, independently of the divine standard; but where both the governors and private members agree that the things imposed are in accordance with the divine standard, then the things imposed by the

* "The rights of conscience are, indeed, beyond the just reach of any human power. They are given by God, and cannot be encroached upon by human authority, without a criminal disobedience of the precepts of natural as well as of revealed religion."—Story, on the Constitution of the United States, vol. ii. p. 594.

governors are binding on the private members, as in the case of class meetings. So long as Methodists believe class meetings to be warranted in substance by the written word of God, that is, required for the peace, order, and continuance of the Methodist Church, they are bound, by their voluntary association with the church, to observe them as the church requires; and non-observance, therefore, is a just ground of exclusion.

It is an axiom of reason, that all who are admitted into a particular church *must consent to be governed by the laws and regulations of that church, according to its constitution, as constituted at the time of their entrance into it, and in accordance with the written word of God.** In this case, every one voluntarily parts with so much of his natural rights as is required for the peace and well-being of the church. This consent is expressed formally in baptism, because baptism is the formal, sensible initiation into the church of Christ; and he that is baptized by the Methodist ministry consents to be governed by the laws and regulations of the Methodist Church, and to keep its "outward rules." "Nature requires, that every one entering into a society should consent to the rules of it. Our Saviour hath determined how this consent should be expressed, viz., by receiving baptism from those who have power to dispense it: which is the federal right whereby our consent is expressed to own all the laws, and submit to them, whereby this society (the church) is governed."† And so our discipline prescribes: "Let none be received into the church, until they have been recommended by a leader with whom they have met at least six months on trial, and have been baptized, and shall, on examination by the minister in charge, give satisfactory assurances both of the correctness of their faith, and of their

* Stillingfleet's Irenicum, p. 159.

† Ibid., p. 160.

willingness to observe and keep the rules of the church."* This consent is confirmed by the six months' probation; and the candidate received into full membership is regarded as having voluntarily and deliberately assumed the obligation to "observe and keep all the rules of the church;" and one of these is the rule on the subject of the classes, the observance of which was made the test of reception into the church. It is to be observed, there is an antecedent obligation upon all men, binding them to this voluntary consent to join the Christian church; and he who thus joins our branch of the Christian church, the Methodist Church, for instance, joins the Christian church, and voluntarily consents to "observe and keep the rules" of that branch of the Christian church. In baptism, then, a Methodist solemnly consents and pledges himself "to observe and keep the rule" on the subject of class meeting. Not that this duty is expressed, but it is implied. "The desire of admission doth necessarily imply men's consenting to the laws of that society, and walking according to the duties of it; and so they are *consequentially* and *virtually*, though not *expressly* and *formally*, bound to all the duties required of them in that relation."† In the case of persons baptized in infancy, there is no necessity of rebaptism, since they can now declare their own voluntary consent to submit to the laws of Christ, and to conform their lives to the profession of Christianity which their infant baptism *prospectively* embraced, that is, required should be done as soon as they arrived at responsible age.

But antecedently to the formal and voluntary consent to enter the church, there is obligation upon every person to embrace and profess the Christian religion, and discharge all the duties which the gospel imposes; and consequently every Christian is bound to obey the rules and regulations

* *Discipline, 1854, pp. 96, 97.*

† *Stillingfleet's Irenicum, p. 166.*

of the particular evangelical church with which he associates himself. This obligation exists antecedently to the constitution of the government of any particular church, and the government, when constituted, expresses and enforces this obligation. Consent is supposed, and association necessary to church-government, it is true; but the authority of the government originates in a higher source than the consent of the individual members of the church; and therefore whenever a person voluntarily joins a particular evangelical church, he is bound to observe and keep all the rules and regulations of that particular church, provided its rules and regulations be consistent with divine authority. If the laws of the church be of this nature, its officers have the power to exclude any offenders. "It were impossible any society should be upheld, if it were not laid down by the founder of the society as the necessary duty of all members to undergo the penalties which shall be inflicted by those who have the care of governing that society, so they be not contrary to the laws, nature, and constitution of it, else there would be no provision made for preventing divisions and confusions, which will happen upon any breach made upon the laws of the society."* And as the enjoyment of the privileges of a particular church depends upon conditions to be discharged by every member of it, and, as already proved, those who have the care of that church are to judge of these conditions, which in all cases must require an evangelical character and life, therefore, whoever fails to discharge them, forfeits all the privileges of that particular church. Indeed, these conditions requiring a separation from the world, and evangelical holiness in heart and life, and being, so long as they are discharged, pledges of right to the enjoyment of all the privileges of the church, he who violates these conditions voluntarily withdraws himself from the church,

* Stillingfleet's *Irenicum*, p. 462.

and does in fact what should be justly and formally done in his case by those in authority in the church. "A person falling into those offences which merit excommunication, is supposed, in so doing, voluntarily to renounce his interest in those privileges, the enjoyment of which doth depend upon abstaining from those offences which he wilfully falls into, especially if contumacy be found with them, as it is before excommunication, for then nothing is done forcibly toward him; for he first relinquished his right, before the church governor declares him excluded the society. So that the offender doth meritoriously excommunicate himself; the pastor doth it formally by declaring that he hath made himself no member by his offences and contumacy joined with them."*

All we have said in defence of the obligation of class meetings is strongly supported by the benefits of the institution, to which, though an independent part of this Treatise, we shall next give our attention.

* Stillingfleet, Discourse on Power of Excommunication, § 23.

PART III.

Benefits.

CHAPTER I.

BENEFITS ENUMERATED.

THEY are numerous and inestimable :

1. Religious sympathy. The sympathy of a friend is a great privilege and a real felicity in time of trouble, and the want of such a friend is an aggravation of our misery. Whether oppressed by distressing fears or painful doubts, or suffering from secret temptation or open persecution, or contending with inward corruptions or outward afflictions, or seeking a sense of pardoning love or the full salvation of God,—the Christian, by a plain and simple statement of his case, will excite in the minds of his brethren a sincere sympathy and concern in his behalf; and they will recite similar scenes and trials through which they have passed; they will expose the fallacy of his temptations; they will elevate his views of the mercy and goodness of God; they will console and support him by explaining the promises of his grace; they will fervently and repeatedly intercede for the blessings he seeks; they will recount numerous examples of fortitude, patience, and submission suitable to his case; and assure him that his is the ordinary experience of those whom Jesus loves, and that his, if faithful, shall be another instance of the blessed deliverance of the people of God.

2. A holy courage is excited. The glorious facts of religious experience related in class meeting are intensely

animating. Deliverance from the guilt, condemnation, and power of sin,—exultation in the joys of remission of sin—sensible advancement of fellow-Christians toward purifying faith and perfect love—entire sanctification and the seal of the abiding Comforter—the blissful prospects of death and heaven,—are all of this nature. To these may be added the simplicity, meekness, humility, faith, love, patience, resignation, and courage exemplified in the lives of the pious, which add lustre to their testimony. The weak believer is encouraged to besiege the throne of grace with a holy violence and importunity of faith, that he may be saved from all obduracy and unbelief; and overcome inward corruption and outward temptations; and bear patiently the manifold infirmities and defects of himself and others; and subdue all emotions of pride, and self, and any tempers contrary to the love of God and man; and grasp the promises of entire holiness; and acquire the preparation for the open vision of God. And so of other Christians. The inconstant are stimulated to seek to be rooted and established in love; subjects of gloomy reasonings respecting their acceptance, or those who are strongly tempted to doubt the reality of their conversion, are encouraged to plead more earnestly for the witness of the Spirit; those who fear that their repentance and faith were not sincere, are encouraged to redouble their diligence when they hear old and experienced Christians referring in a similar manner to their former experience; those who doubt whether they have any saving faith at all will be elated by the recital of others on the same subject, and be inspired with resolution to approach with humble confidence their heavenly Father for light to scatter their darkness, and enlarge their gracious comforts; and even those (and there are many) who have relapsed and lost their “first love,” are roused to renewed repentance and the performance of their “first works;” in a word, the whole society is spiritually quickened and revived.

3. It is a blessed means of mutual love and help. Love is the tender passion that animates the whole church—the strong bond that binds the whole family of God together. “A new commandment,” says Jesus, “I give unto you, that ye love one another.” “Love one another,” says he again, “as I have loved you.” And says John, “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” In proportion as we love God, we love his people, and help them. And when we see amiable tempers and Christian graces disclosed in the relation of Christian experience, not only mutual confidence is excited, but a very strong attachment also is produced, that extends a mutual help. When a happy correspondence between the outward walk and inward piety of believers is discovered, which can be known only by the disclosure of the interior life, we are not only prepared to comfort, encourage, and strengthen one another, but form an intimacy of the holiest nature, a union of the strongest character, and commingle and heighten the purer charms and real endearments of religious society. Union is strength, and Christian union is the best strength—a strength that the power of earth and hell can neither crush nor resist. There are some Christians whose faith is so strong, and whose love is so pure and fervid, that single-handed they would be more than a match for any combination of enemies that might be formed against them; and it is these who are the leaders and supporters of the weak in the church. “We, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.”* Bear with their errors, and correct them; bear with their scruples, and endeavor to relieve them; bear with their failures, and admonish them to do better in future; bear with their weakness, and strengthen them; bear with their doubts, and remove them; bear with their inconstancy, and confirm them; bear with their coldness,

* Rom. xv. 1.

and animate them ; bear with their fears, and encourage them.

The influence of Christian affection, sympathy, and faith, in a class-room, extends farther than to the encouraging the weak and timid ; it also attracts every member into closer fellowship. And so one class becomes endeared to another, till the whole church lives in the unity of the Spirit. But where the intimate spiritual fellowship of the class meeting is unknown, it is not surprising that piety should decline, divisions and jealousies occur, other means of grace be neglected, and the church suffer loss both in influence and number. “*On Monday and Tuesday,*” says Mr. Wesley, “I took an account of the society, (at Cork,) and was grieved, though not surprised, to find such a declension. I left two hundred and ninety members : I find only two hundred and thirty-three. And what will the end be, unless those that remain learn to bear one another’s burdens ?”* And yet in another case, where this means of grace was observed, Mr. Wesley found great reason to bless God : “In examining this society, (at Port Isaac,) I found much reason to bless God on their behalf. They diligently observe all the rules of the society, with or without a preacher. They constantly attend the church and sacrament, and meet together at the times appointed. The consequence is, that thirty out of thirty-five, their whole number, continue to walk in the light of God’s countenance.”† Again : “I rode to Chester. Never was the society in such a state before. Their jars and contentions were at an end ; and I found nothing but peace and love among them. About twelve of them believed they were saved from sin ; and their lives did not contradict their profession. Most of the rest were strongly athirst for God, and looking for him continually.”‡

The influence of example, especially of religious example,

* Wesley’s Works, vol. iv. p. 70.

† Ibid. p. 72.

‡ Ibid. p. 134.

is undeniable. Take a case from Mr. Wesley's Journal : "Here (Whitby) I found a lively society indeed : the chief reason of their liveliness was this :—Those who were renewed in love, (about forty in number,) continuing fervent in spirit and zealous for God, quickened the rest, and were a blessing to all around them."* Beyond all doubt, nothing is more encouraging to one groaning after a deeper work of grace, than to see a higher state exemplified in others around him, and with whom he has occasional religious intercourse. Nor is any thing more comforting to one weak and weary, than to feel that not only Christ, but his people, help to bear his burden, care for him, watch over him in love, advise and exhort him from time to time, and pray with him, and for him, as he has need. "It can scarce be conceived," says Mr. Wesley, "what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation, (the class meeting.) Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens,' and naturally to 'care for each other.' As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And, speaking the truth in love, they grew up into him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying itself in love."† Each class is built up in its most holy faith, delivered from temptations out of which they saw no way of escape, rejoicing in the Lord more abundantly, and effectually provoking each other, throughout the family of classes in any particular station or circuit, to abound in every good word and work.

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 380.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 180.

Society, whether political, commercial, civil, conventional, or benevolent, is founded upon the social nature of man. But nowhere is society so exalted as in the church of God. God made man social, in the purest sense; incorporating, in his original nature, all the elements required to constitute the holiest society. The church is designed to effect a universal harmony and fellowship, and every well-regulated and holy society of Christians is a type of the general result. In the church there is less of moral evil, and less of its effects, than in other societies; the members are united to one another by ties of love, permanent as the soul; each member united to Christ, and one with him, the Head, as he is one with the Father; and hence, next to communion with God, is the communion of saints. A profound import of baptism, the external seal of the everlasting covenant, is Christian fellowship; and when all nations are regenerated and baptized, whatever may be their ecclesiastical differences, they will form one grand Christian society. Mutual love in the class-room promotes this fellowship. "Mutual acquaintance with each other is thus formed; the leader is the friend and adviser of all; and among the members, by their praying with and for each other so often, the 'true fellowship of saints is promoted.'"^{*} Sublime the vision of millennial love and fellowship!

4. It is a most powerful method of preserving the church against lukewarmness and formality. There is nothing attractive in the class meeting to the formalist. In public worship, in hearing the word, in receiving the sacraments, he may borrow a Christian name, and fill up his place with worldly advantage and credit; and in ordinary conversation, on the general history, doctrines, and advantages of Christianity, he may express his admiration, and display his talents; but when he is required to disclose his own *reli-*

* Watson's Life of Wesley, p. 96.

gious experience, and relate candidly and humbly the progress of spiritual life in his own soul, he is either tortured into negative and evasive answers, or dissimulates a piety corresponding to his pretensions. He cannot endure the heart-searching examination which discriminates between what he *is*, and what he *knows* and *professes*; and so he is seldom found at class meeting. Nor is that all: conscious of his destitution of experimental knowledge, and compelled to repress all high pretensions to piety, he is never found heartily engaged in special religious meetings, as in times of revival, and so he contents himself as a decent hearer of the Word, as a devout observer of the sacrament, and as a supporter of the general objects of Christianity, to which he contributes his money and influence, and that, too, in order to maintain a fair reputation as an avowed friend of the church. A proper observance of the class meeting would soon either cure or remove this evil from the church; for formalists then would shortly become what they ought to be, or retire from the church because they will not consent to become what they are required to be.

And so of lukewarm professors. Formerly, loving God and happy in his service, they were fond of their class. But degenerating in spiritual life and comfort, cultivating daily the love of riches and pleasure, and daily neglecting repentance before God, very naturally at length it became exceedingly disagreeable to relate the state of their heart to others. They are now subjects of a most painful conflict; the strivings of the Spirit and the remains of the carnal mind are in commotion. Pride, self-esteem, and love of the world are in constant contention with the obligations of humility, love of God, and love of his service. And so the lukewarm are fruitful in excuses for the neglect of class: pressure and hurry of business, slight indisposition, unfavorable weather, engagements with company, unexpected occurrences, and such-like impediments, afford

a temporary pacification of their conscience, and become the flimsy apologies for their absence. This sad state of things should not continue long; for, despairing themselves of receiving any good, and their brethren of doing them any good, they should either quietly withdraw from the church, or be prudently discontinued, lest the societies with which they are associated degenerate into the ordinary state of mere formal churches. The lukewarm professor, however, is a case the most difficult to reach by a course of discipline, and there is no process so suitable to reclaim him as the social service of the classes. This means is a test of the spirituality of our church; and that church which is in the habitual neglect of it is in a worldly, lukewarm state, apply the test where and when you will. And revival of spirituality can only be secured by returning to the true and original design of this prominent and indispensable institution of Methodism.

5. It is the principal means through which the ministry of our church obtain information of the people's spiritual state and experience. This, at large, has already been considered; but the subject is so important that a few words may be added. An intimate acquaintance with the spiritual character of the classes enables the pastor to apply the promises or the warnings, the admonitions or the counsels of the gospel, as occasion may require; to ascertain how believers were edified and comforted, strengthened and confirmed under his preaching; how the tempted were supported and relieved; how the doubting were encouraged, and their hopes revived; how the backslidden were arrested and reclaimed; how the lukewarm were aroused and reanimated; and how sinners were awakened and renewed. By hearing experience, he cultivates his abilities to preach, and repairs to the pulpit with the warmest sympathies and the liveliest vigor, and preaches with a potency he never could have acquired by the most extensive reading and

intense study; exposing the conscience, refuting objections, adducing arguments, presenting motives, and describing each case before him with astonishing exactitude and astounding effect, as if he had received previously particular information of every member of his congregation; ever and anon striking skilfully some common cord that vibrates throughout the whole assembly, and impressing all with profound silence and amazement as their hearts are laid bare in the powerful light of the gospel. He is now a workman that needeth not to be ashamed or afraid, for he is fully the master of his subject in its sublime and exact adaptation to his flock before him. Every truth he utters is a sharp and barbed arrow, a nail in a sure place, a piercing stroke of the sword of the Spirit, a crushing blow of the hammer of omnipotence, a penetrating beam of celestial light, clear and bright as noonday, a current of fire that melts, expands, and purifies, a motive that absorbs the entire being of the hearer in the boundless and endless future. Sublime work! Compared with this, what are even judicious explanations and beautiful illustrations of the Scriptures, that may indeed instruct and charm the refined, and acquire for the orator the fame of an orthodox and popular speaker! Without this, melody of voice, graces of elocution, beauty of rhetoric, cogency of logic, and the most profound learning, are but the splendid appendages with which human invention vainly, and sometimes with good intention, attempts to adorn and elevate the spirituality of the gospel.

And, added to all this, class meetings contribute greatly to a mutual endearment between the pastor and his flock. Mutual acquaintance and familiarity will encourage the people to disclose their spiritual doubts and troubles to their pastor, which will not be done when he is a stranger to them; and how, then, can he do them much good, or he care much for them, or they for him?

6. They prepare the church for *the better understanding of the preaching*. By the personal intercourse of the pastor with the classes, and through the information he obtains from the leaders, he is better prepared to select appropriate subjects for preaching. The leaders, likewise instructed by the preaching, are enabled to instruct their classes, and so prepare them the better to understand the preacher: the leaders convey from the preacher instruction to their classes, and then bring their classes, with their minds and hearts prepared to receive instruction from the public ministration of the Word. Otherwise, much of the public labor must be lost. This is one reason, doubtless, why so often sermons are heard without interest or profit; they are inappropriate; the preacher knows not exactly what will be appropriate, and he must select to fill up the time. There is a connection between the pulpit and the class-room; the one prepares the better for the other; and the duties of both should be so performed that the church shall go from the pulpit with a new interest to the class-room, and come from the class-room with a new interest to the services of the pulpit.

CHAPTER II.

BENEFITS CONTINUED.

1. CLASS MEETINGS are a most powerful help to young Christians, and that, too, at a time when they need help the most. Stability, in a great measure, depends upon the incipient stages of spiritual life; then, as in the infancy of the natural body, a weak or strong constitution is formed. The church cannot devote too much care to the "babes in Christ," and our church has no better means in nursing them than the class meeting—none, indeed, so good. The young Christian soon finds his feeble resolutions unequal to the force of habits formed before conversion, and the power of temptation, ever recurring in old modes or new ones; and unless he promptly and habitually seek support from the religious communion of the class-room, seldom can he endure the first revival of evil habit or resist the first assault of temptation; and shortly he will relapse into his former sins. Without the repeated counsel and admonition of the church, such as the class-room affords, he is easily accessible to the appeals of pleasing and lucrative vices, and wanders alone amid invisible dangers and insidious snares that surround him on every hand, every moment liable to fall alone, with none to hold him up when he is falling, and none to lift him up when he falls. Unsupported, the vows of the morning are violated before the evening, and remorse for recent guilt is so discouraging, that ordinarily the only relief he feels is in the resolution, "I will repent and do better to-morrow;" and, to-morrow, weakness, disappointment and fear ensue, and matters are worse. Had he

mingled with God's people, he might have fulfilled his vows, or had he fallen, he might have recovered ; but by hiding his failures, he had to contend with them alone, and by concealing his good desires, he took the most effectual method to extinguish them altogether.

A change of heart requires a change of company, corresponding in character and example to the new nature, whose affectionate care and consideration shall defend young Christians especially against their besetting sins, strengthen them to resist temptation, and inspire their good desires with strength and vigor. It is the policy of the powers of darkness first to divide, and then devour. Eve was deceived and destroyed in the absence of Adam ; Peter denied Jesus in company of the wicked ; and young Christians ordinarily take the first step in returning to the world in abandoning the company and communion of saints. It is a most difficult matter sometimes for the truly penitent sinner, with all the aid of the church and of divine grace in a powerful revival, to relinquish the world, subdue self, vanquish Satan, and obtain pardon ; and nothing conceivable is easier than the fall and recapture of the young convert when left alone in the camp of his numerous and mighty enemies. Every young Christian may clearly infer from the great help he received from the church in conversion, how indispensable is the help of the church to aid him in pursuing his new and untried career. He is weak, and needs support ; he is ignorant, and needs instruction ; he is inexperienced, and needs counsel ; he is fearful, and needs encouragement ; he is inconsistent, and needs restraints ; he is but a babe in Christ, and just as much needs the care of the church, to rear him to spiritual manhood, as the infant does that of his mother to raise and prepare him for this life.

Whenever the young Christian voluntarily neglects the class meeting, he takes the first certain step either for a speedy return to the world, or in the certain direction to a

life of lukewarmness and formality : in either case, incalculable danger accumulates with every neglect. No doubt the vast amount of backsliding, and the vast extent of formality and worldliness in many places in our church, are to be ascribed chiefly to the general neglect of this means of grace. It is painful to witness these results from any source, but that they should flow from mere *neglect*, which might be so easily corrected, is just occasion of great surprise and deep regret. The first time the young Christian enters the classroom, let him rest assured that he has entered, as a Methodist, upon the only path that can secure him against backsliding or formality, and conduct him into the bright and fruitful fields of spiritual life. Here let him take his stand, and here let the ministry, leaders, and members stand by him.

How little do most Christians, especially young Christians, know of the purity and extent of the divine law ; of the suitableness, preciousness, unchangeableness, and proper use of the divine promises ; of the force, beauty, harmony, tendency, and issue of Christian obligation ; of the offices of Christ, as prophet, priest, and king ; of the offices of the Holy Spirit in convincing, humbling, comforting, assisting, and directing ; of the devices of Satan, his strength, his ingenuity, his cruelty, his vigilance, his agents, and modes of attack ; of ourselves, our weakness, instability, ignorance, presumption, and necessities ; and of what God has done for eminent saints, and what he is willing to do for us ! And yet all these may be known by frequent intercourse with deeply pious and experienced Christians, who will teach and direct us in the ways of God more perfectly. Ignorant, for example, of the progress of spiritual things, those who just begin to feel their want of mercy, and contend with the in-being of sin, ordinarily suppose that their case is singular, which exposes them to many doubts and fears and the most violent assaults of Satan

But communion with the experienced people of God soon convinces them that their case is not uncommon; the devices of Satan are detected, his snares avoided, courage is excited, hope revived, faith strengthened, and timidity, doubt, and darkness vanish away.

2. They afford penitents a great help in seeking religion. This seems to have been originally the principal design of the "societies" instituted by Mr. Wesley, and it is so stated in the language of our Discipline: "There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.'"^{*} Often, in his Journal, Mr. Wesley refers to the societies in such a manner as to leave it clearly inferrible that the large majority in them were merely seekers of religion. As, for instance: "In the hours between, I took the opportunity of speaking to the members of the society. In three months here (Colchester) are joined together a hundred and twenty persons. *A few* of these *know* in whom they have believed, and many are sensible of their wants."[†] In the class meeting, where religious experience is the only subject of consideration, and the expression of it is so plain and simple, it is easy to see how readily an earnest and sincere penitent may obtain instruction and encouragement; as when those who are deeply acquainted with spiritual things refer to the discouragements they encountered, the struggles they endured, the self-denial they had to exercise, the duties they had to perform, and the long, dark night of trial they had to pass, before they found forgiveness of sin. And then the impressive sacredness of the occasion, the singular appropriateness of the songs and prayers, the tender sympathies of Christians, and the instructions of the pious leader, all contribute greatly to aid in the solemn work of repentance and faith. In the

* Discipline, p. 23, edition 1846.

† Journal, vol. iv. p. 11.

suspension of temporal business, in the absence of the world, and in the presence of Christ and his people, the whole soul of the penitent may easily concentrate itself upon being now saved from sin. Besides, persons awakened under some powerful sermon, or during a revival, by immediately joining the class, often retain their religious impressions, and so cultivate and improve them, as soon to obtain pardon, and commence a new and spiritual life, and so at last are saved; whereas, had they declined this privilege, they would have relapsed into worse than their former insensibility, and so at last probably been lost. Specially suitable as a means of grace is the class meeting to those who are awakened under the preaching of an *itinerant* ministry. When the stirring appeals of the preacher are ended, and he is gone to another part of his work; when the exciting scenes of a revival are over, and the church has returned to its ordinary and regular services; when the promiscuous multitude has retired from the house of God, and distributed itself among congenial pursuits; then, in the class-room, where the ardor of religion still glows, and the blessed results of the revival are more immediately and specially seen, the awakened sinner may still enjoy a lively communion with the people of God, and derive important help from the faithful leader. The leader now, in an important sense, takes the place of the preacher, and supplies his absence.

We have said that originally the Wesleyan societies were composed principally of awakened persons, and this is universal still with the societies in England in the present day. In the recent great revival in England, under the labors of Mr. Caughey, thousands were converted who were already members of the church. In our own church, especially in the South and West, hundreds are converted, from time to time, who had been received into the church as seekers of religion, and ordinarily now many are received as such in times of revival. And in times of revival, in the South

and West, it is not unfrequently the case that persons who for years had been associated with the church as seekers of religion, approach the altar, and obtain the blessedness of pardon. It were well if this custom universally prevailed; it were well if ordinarily after the sermon, that is, such a sermon as is truly awakening, the preacher would give an opportunity to awakened persons to join the society; for this would be the restoration of primitive Methodism. It is not assumed that systematic and protracted meetings should be dispensed with, for no one can estimate the immense good that has resulted from these meetings, and they should be continued; but we mean, where a religious meeting cannot be conveniently protracted, or on all proper occasions, the primitive custom should prevail. Nor do we think it wise or proper that seekers of religion should be received into full membership after six months' probation, unless in that time they have obtained regeneration; yet they may be continued in association with the class till this great work is effected. Mr. Wesley formed his societies in the church of England, and he continued seekers of religion in them for no specific time, but just so long as they maintained the form, and sought the power of godliness. In like manner, seekers of religion may be continued on probation so long as they observe the "General Rules of our United Societies,"* or until they obtain the experimental knowledge of sins forgiven, when they may be received into full membership.

It is not surprising that in process of time, wherever the class meeting had fallen into disuse, the custom of receiving awakened persons on trial was discontinued, because now this principal means of promoting religious impressions was abandoned. In many places in our church the reception of an awakened person on trial seldom occurs. Long since, in

* Discipline, 1854, p. 29.

some places, this custom has been wholly abandoned. And in many places, nevertheless, where it is still observed, but little advantage, if any, is derived, because the class meeting is not perpetuated and observed in its original vigor and spirit. What inducement is there for an awakened person to associate himself with a church, on trial, in which this means of grace no longer exists, or is considered as of little moment, or is observed with but little interest?

3. Class meetings prepare the church for conducting revivals. In the first place, the leaders are here prepared to act a most efficient part in revivals, and they compose a large proportion of the strong, influential, and spiritual men of our church. Having attained a high degree of experimental religion, and acquired, by the exercises of the class-room, a great facility to instruct, exhort, comfort, strengthen, and warn others, they are prepared to labor efficiently in revivals. They are acquainted with the people generally, and with their classes particularly; and hence, if faithful, they exert a greater influence over the people and their classes, and the church, than private members ordinarily can do. They feel a deeper interest in the welfare of their classes, and are more anxious that they all should enjoy and engage actively in the work of revival. These are the principal men to pray for a revival, to labor in a revival, to seek out, encourage, and bring penitents to the altar in time of revival; and to sing, and pray, and instruct them at the altar; and then to take care of them when converted. These are the men on whom we depend principally for the efficiency of our revivals. I do not know how we could dispense with them in revivals. How much the class-leaders contribute to making the Methodist Church a *revival* church no one can estimate. No wonder other churches generally are so unskilled and inefficient in revivals. They have no men like these leaders to bring forward into battle; no class of men like them to engage in the work of revival. Each leader, accustomed

long to guide, conducts his class into the battle-field, and shouts them forward to the contest. There is the leader in the hottest of the battle; yes, *there* he is, and the faithful class is certain to rally around him. It is impossible to conceive of a better battle-array of the sacramental host in time of a revival than the leaders with their classes arranged around the standard of Christ. May God bless the leaders a thousand fold with the power of faith and prayer, and thus render our revivals in the same proportion more extensive and powerful! It is a matter of deep regret, however, that in many places, the leaders have so long neglected their *classes*, that they are weak as other men in times of revival; and the classes have so long neglected their leaders, that they rather need reviving themselves, than they are prepared to engage in reviving others; that their leaders feel comparatively little concern for them, and can exert but little influence over them. This general neglect of the class meeting is, doubtless, the reason why in many places revivals are so rare, or, when they do occur, they are so brief and feeble. May God rouse these dead-hearted and inactive leaders and classes wherever they exist, that then revivals may break out and expand like fire in dry stubble in every part of the church, for then the leaders and the classes will be prepared to labor in revivals, and to take care of souls when converted! Then it would not take, as now, in some places it does, three or four days' or a week's hard labor to begin a revival; for the hardest part of the work now is to get the church right, and ready for the work. They have neglected their ordinary religious duties with respect to themselves so long, that it is impossible to excite them to feel much for others before they begin to feel for themselves. But the church, in any place, being prepared for work, revival would commence with the first earnest efforts, and progress with astonishing ease, rapidity, and power. God help us!

In the second place, the classes are prepared in the class-room to labor most efficiently in revivals. This is so obvious, that we need but mention it, and express our regret that the churches, in many places, have neglected this means of revival-energy, which is the reason why they so seldom have a revival of much extent. On the whole, we conclude, no other regulation of Methodism, except its *itinerancy*, prepares the church so well to labor in revivals as the class meeting, and we believe that the spirit of revival will flourish or decline in proportion as the class meeting is observed or neglected. And if this be so, as it most certainly is, the most solemn responsibility rests upon the church to revive the institution where it has been neglected, and to perpetuate it where it has been observed. If our church be not replenished with the fruits of revivals, it must soon pass away from the earth; and what must be the indifference of that Methodist who can survey the issue without concern? or what must be the punishment of him who promotes that issue by his neglect?

CHAPTER III.

BENEFITS CONTINUED.

1. THE class meeting has all the advantages of a verbal relation of religious experience. There is something in the tone of voice and manner of the sincere Christian which excites a degree of sympathy, tenderness, and conviction, that no written statements can excite. The eloquence of the tongue infinitely surpasses that of the pen or of type. With delight and profit we read graphic and elegant biographical sketches of religious men, as well as excellent books on religious experience; but with how much greater delight would we have listened to the glowing statements as they fell from the lips of the living authors and good men, accompanied with corresponding expressions of countenance and tones of voice! Could Christians now assemble with Christ and his apostles, and *see* them, and *hear* them, as they utter the very expressions now contained in the Bible, no language can describe the difference in the impression that would be made. Could we meet with Wesley and the first Methodist preachers, and *hear* their instructions, and descriptions of their trials, and difficulties, and temptations, and faith, and love, and religious attainments, it is easy to see how much more intense would be our feelings than it is possible for them to become from a most careful reading of their writings. A prayer, a sermon, advice, counsel, admonition *heard*, are much more powerful than when *read*. What description of holy praise can produce the feelings excited by hearing it? Impressions made in religious fel-

lowship are always more intense and lasting than can be made through any other medium.

“The characteristic of our classes, bands, and love-feasts is the free and simple communication of mutual experience; and here, in the judgment of some of the wisest, is found their unanswerable plea. Let the inquirer see, scattered over the writings of the best practical divines, admonitions to the effect that reserve and silence, on the subject of spiritual exercises, are most prejudicial; that the devices of Satan are of tenfold difficulty when they are shrouded in concealment; and that it is eminently advantageous to hear and tell of God’s dealings with the soul. The world may direct against those who ‘speak often one to another’ its impotent scorn; but they are abundantly compensated by the sweetness of the social privilege, and the ‘joys with which a stranger intermeddleth not.’”*

2. Furnish advantages to several classes of Christians that require unremitting and the most diligent care. There are the *young* and the *weak*, who are generally content with low attainments in grace, and who, in our church, without the constant care of the leader, would rarely, we have said, get higher than their “first love,” and in most cases lose that. It is no easy matter to increase any Christians in knowledge and gifts, and it is the most difficult of all to increase them in graces. Hence, their love should be kept constantly burning, their faith constantly strengthening, their regard for the honors and pleasures and profits of the world constantly decreasing, their affection for the cause of Christ and for the brethren constantly increasing, and their obligation to suffer joyfully for Christ’s sake, to walk inoffensively and harmlessly before men, to abstain from the appearance of evil, and to imbue all their conduct with a sweet mixture of all the graces of the Christian, be ever kept prominently

* Wes. Meth. Mag. 1841. Ser., Methodism not Heresy, p. 649,

before their minds; and the young will soon become experienced, and the weak strong, in the life and service of Christ.

Then there are those who are laboring under *some particular corruption*; and there are very many of this sort in the church. Pride predominates over other corruptions in some, vanity in others, love of pleasure in others, love of money in others, worldly ambition in others, sensual desires in others, forwardness in others, irritability in others, levity in others, envy in others, jealousy in others, maliciousness in others, covetousness in others, penuriousness in others, prodigality in others, deceit in others, insincerity in others, resentment in others, impatience in others, self-righteousness in others: in a word, every Christian, in a regenerate state, finds remaining in him, though subdued, some particular corruption still struggling, which was prominent in the corruptions of his heart before conversion, and which will remain there till he is *sanctified*. Each of these cases requires a particular assistance, in order to a complete conquest; and when they submit to the weekly watch-care, and directions of the leader, and are brought weekly into association with persons eminent for godliness, they are enabled to make the clearest discoveries of the odiousness of sin, and to use the best means for their polishing and perfection.

Then there are *declining* Christians, who have lost their first love, whose zeal and diligence have abated, and who are in extreme danger of entire relapse to the world. Partial backsliding tends to total apostasy, and, without special attention and special grace, will speedily result in it. A spark may be the commencement of a conflagration, and disease, unless arrested in its incipiency, will terminate in death. The descent of the crag from the mountain is first slow, then rapid, then resistless. Extinguish the spark, cure the disease in the beginning, stop the crag in the moment it is starting. The application is easy, and the application is made best practically in the class meeting.

Then there are *advancing* Christians, who must be assisted or they will decline. In the class they are assisted to preserve what they have, to make further progress upon what they obtain, and so to persevere to the end. They are prepared thus for the service of Christ, and so in turn assist their brethren to engage in his service.

To all these the “class meeting is calculated to be a school of instruction ; a book by the way ; a refreshment-room for travellers. Here the disconsolate Christian is directed to the God of all consolation ; the thirsty soul is directed to ‘the fountain of living waters ;’ the suffering follower of the Saviour meets with sympathy from fellow-sufferers, and the rejoicing saint meets with those in whose breast exists the counterpart of his own feelings, and the echo of his own joys. Here the weary traveller is refreshed, and starts with new vigor on his journey to Canaan ; and the tired soldier is rested and invigorated for the campaign of to-morrow. Here the weakness of ‘Little-faith’ is strengthened, the worldliness of ‘Worldly-love’ is chased away, the covetousness of ‘Save-all’ is melted into benevolence, and the duplicity of ‘By-ends’ is transformed into sterling straightforwardness. Here sluggishness is converted into activity, misanthropy into philanthropy, tears into smiles, sorrows into joys, sighs into songs, clouds into sunshine, winter into summer, and the ‘fear which hath torment’ into ‘perfect love, which casteth out fear.’ Class meetings are the little tents of Israel, pitched in every direction around the mercy-seat and the Shekinah, for the refreshment of the tribes during their wilderness state. ‘How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel ! As the valleys are they spread forth as gardens by the river-side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his bucket, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall

be exalted. Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee!"*"

3. They are the best help in our church against the influence of the world. "I met the classes at Limerick," says Mr. Wesley, "and found a considerable decrease. And how can it be otherwise, when vice flows as a torrent, unless the children of God are all life, zeal, activity."† Life, zeal, and activity can be promoted nowhere better than in the class-room; and without habitual observance of the class meeting, life, zeal, and activity will decline, and the soul be borne away by the torrent of fashion, excitement, and worldly enterprise. In the class-room, the danger is exposed, the warning given, and security obtained. "On the three following days, I spoke severally to the members of the society, (in Bristol.) As many of them increase in worldly goods, the great danger I apprehend now is their relapsing into the spirit of the world; and then their religion is but a dream."‡

Especially in an age like this is the class meeting in the highest degree beneficial. The vast and varied amplitude of society is stirring with activity, bustle, and enterprise; politics, commerce, education, and circumstantial religion are all bending forward under the influence of emulation, competition, and intense excitement. Steadiness, principle, system, self-denial, retirement, meditation, are comparatively unknown; and the contagion has spread from the city to the country, from the market to the farms of men, from one end to the other of the civilized world. The facilities of science have but contributed to heighten the excitement and ferment. Men are living and laboring for time as they should for eternity. In this state of things, the formation of a symmetrical religious character seems impossible, at

* London Christ. Miscellany.

† Wesley's Works, Journal, vol. iv. p. 68.

‡ Ibid. p. 77.

least is most difficult. Religious devotion is confined almost entirely to the Sabbath day, and even then it is exercised in a weak and languishing manner. Men are in such haste to be wise and rich in this world's affairs, that religious knowledge is almost exclusively acquired from the pulpit. But little is known of seclusion and the deep calm of retirement, in which man most easily grasps the mighty truths and interests of his being, and forms the great purpose to check the morbid, versatile, superficial, and unquiet spirit of the age. Just here the class meeting comes to his help, and by it he is enabled to straighten up himself and breathe freely, and lean the other way, and oppose the tendencies of society and his own mind; and retire from the perplexing scenes and strifes around him; and subtract some time from worldly business and care for communion with God and eternal things; and examine his heart, his principles, his motives, his conduct, and his accounts with God; and then go forth again into the world, desiring nothing in comparison with advancement in the great spiritual work of his soul, and increasing in every devout and holy affection, and being more abundant in every good word and work.

4. Wherever the class meeting is properly and regularly observed the church is in a flourishing condition.

It is a matter of universal observation by our preachers, and it is attested by all, that the principal supporters of our church are those who are in the habitual observance of this means of grace. It is true, ordinarily, they are comparatively few in number. But they are those who are found regularly at the weekly prayer-meetings; who are regular in observing the Sabbath day; who are found punctually at the sacrament; who are present and generally speak in the love-feasts; who are found near the altar, and labor in revivals; who principally and most generously support the church, and maintain its benevolent and religious enterprises; who are most steadfast in the profession of the

faith ; whose example is most influential and beneficial ; who lead the most consistent lives ; and who die the most happy and triumphant deaths. And if this may be said of a small proportion of any of our churches, what would be the general result if all in Methodism observed this means of grace ? The church then would constantly enjoy peace, union, and prosperity ; always advance ; never be without the spirit of revival, either in the membership or among the unconverted ; and coldness, deadness, declension, be unknown. Such societies or churches existed under Mr. Wesley's care. "In the afternoons," says he, "I spoke to the members of the society, (in Dublin.) I left four hundred and forty, and find above five hundred ; more than ever they were since my first landing in the kingdom. And they are not increased in number only, but many of them are rejoicing in the pure love of God ; and many more refuse to be comforted till they can witness the same confession."* Again : "Here, (Medros,) likewise, we had an agreeable account of a still-increasing work of God. This society has eighty-six members, and all rejoicing in the love of God. Fifty-five or fifty-six of these believe he has saved them from all sin ; and their life no way contradicts their profession."† The heart-searching, instructive, and encouraging service of the class meeting certainly tends to a growth in grace, and hereby believers groan constantly after full redemption ; and wherever this service is neglected backsliding in heart ensues, and instances of sanctification are unknown. Even preaching, in this case, on the subject of sanctification, is seldom heard. Says Mr. Wesley : "Monday 30, and the two following days, I examined the society at Bristol, and was surprised to find fifty members fewer than I left in it last October. One reason is, Christian perfection has been little insisted on ; and wherever this is

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 216.

† Ibid. p. 220.

not done, be the preacher ever so eloquent, there is little increase either in the number or the grace of the hearers.”* But there was a better state of things in this society the year following: “On *Monday* and *Tuesday* I examined the society at Bristol, and found cause to rejoice over these; although there is still a heaviness of spirit upon many, indeed, on all who are not going on to perfection.”† Of another society he says: “Afterward I met the society (Worcester) of about a hundred members, all of one heart and one mind; so lovingly and closely united together, that I have scarce seen the like in the kingdom.”‡ Of another society he says: “We went to Whitehaven, where there is a fairer prospect than has been for many years. The society is united in love, not conformed to the world, but laboring to experience the full image of God wherein they were created.”§ Of another society he says: “I found this (Arbroath) to be a genuine Methodist society: they are all thoroughly united to each other. They love and keep our rules; they long and expect to be perfected in love: if they continue so to do they will and must increase in number, as well as in grace.”|| Of another society he says: “Indeed, the society here (Stokesley) may be a pattern to all in England. They despise all ornaments but good works, together with a meek and a quiet spirit. I did not see a ruffle, no, nor a fashionable cap, among them, though many of them are in easy circumstances.”¶ Of another society he says: “I met such a select society as I have not seen since I left London. They were about forty, of whom I did not find one who had not a clear witness of being saved from inbred sin. Several of them had lost it for a season, but could never rest till they had recovered it. And every one of them seemed now to walk in the full

* Wesley’s Works, vol. iv. p. 220. † Ibid. p. 293.

‡ Ibid. p. 590.

|| Ibid. p. 591.

‡ Ibid. 322.

¶ Ibid. 596.

light of God's countenance."* Of another society he says: "On *Tuesday* and the three following days, I examined the society, (Dublin.) I never found it in such a state before; many of them rejoiced in God their Saviour, and were as plain in their apparel, both men and women, as those in Bristol and London. Many, I verily believe, love God with all their hearts; and the number of these increase daily. The number of the whole society is seven hundred and forty-seven. Above three hundred of these have been added in a few months—a new and unexpected thing! In various places, indeed, we have frequently felt

'The o'erwhelming power of saving grace,'

which acted almost irresistibly."†

This was in 1785. In three years from this time, Mr. Wesley writes, "I returned to Bristol, and on the four following days was sufficiently employed in meeting the classes. At each end of the town the society increases

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 597.

† Ibid. p. 611. On this extraordinary work, Mr. Wesley makes a useful comment: "But such a shower of grace never continued long; and afterward men might resist the Holy Ghost as before. When the general ferment subsides, every one that partook of it has his trial for life; and the higher the flood, the lower will be the ebb; yea, the more swiftly it rose, the more swiftly it falls: so that if we see this here, we should not be discouraged. We should only use all diligence to encourage as many as possible to press forward, in spite of all the refluent tide. Now, especially, we should warn one another not to grow faint or weary in our mind; if haply we may see such another prodigy as the late one at Paulton, near Bath, where there was a very swift work of God; and yet, a year after, out of a hundred converted, there was not one backslider. The number of children that are clearly converted to God is particularly remarkable. Thirteen or fourteen little maidens in one class are rejoicing in God their Saviour; and are as serious and staid in their whole behaviour as if they were thirty or forty years old. I have much hopes that half of them will be steadfast in the grace of God which they enjoy."

greatly. It does not decrease in any part. Glory be to God!"*

It seems Mr. Wesley regarded the observance of the class meeting to be of prime importance, for he was sure to express his gratification whenever he noticed a society punctual and faithful in attendance upon this means of grace: "In meeting the classes the two next days, I observed one remarkable circumstance: without an absolute necessity, none of this society (at Whitehaven) ever miss their class. Among near two hundred and forty persons, I met one single exception, and no more."†

5. Class meetings secure the permanence of our church. This is evident from the relation which they sustain to our ministry, which is itinerant. They answer an essential and indispensable object in this respect. They preserve the fruits of our itinerant labors. Without the class-meeting system, Methodism, genuine Methodism, is doomed to a lingering and certain death; it cannot long survive the abolition or universal neglect of the classes. We might advance, but it would be like the progress of a victorious army into an enemy's country without leaving behind it a line of well-fortified forts to secure the ground already won, and which must return and fight its battles over again, or perish. Every new class formed is such a fort. And tens of thousands of them are now the great rear-guard of the mighty Methodist army in its onward march to share with other evangelical churches in the conquest of the world. We might preach like a Peter, or a Wesley, or a Whitefield, who were probably the most successful itinerant preachers the world ever saw; and unless, like Peter and Wesley, and unlike Whitefield, we organized the fruits of our labors into classes, for Wesley certainly did it, and Peter something like it, the fruits of our labors, like those

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 706.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 512.

of Whitefield's, would perish with us, unless we abolished the itinerant system, and substituted that of a settled ministry. Take the example of Whitefield as a most invincible proof and instructive lesson.

"From long experience," says Dr. Adam Clarke, "I know the propriety of Mr. Wesley's advice to the preachers: 'Establish class meetings and form societies wherever you preach and have attentive hearers. Long experience shows the necessity of this; for wherever we have preached without doing this, the word has been like seed sown by the wayside.' It was by this means that we have been enabled to establish permanent and holy churches over the world. Mr. Wesley saw the necessity of this from the beginning. Mr. Whitefield, when he separated from Mr. Wesley, did not follow it. What was the consequence? The fruit of Mr. Whitefield's labors died with himself. Mr. Wesley's fruit remains, grows, increases, and multiplies exceedingly. Did Mr. Whitefield see his error? He did; but not till it was too late. His people, long unused to it, would not come under this discipline. Have I authority to say so? I have. Forty years ago I travelled in the Bradford, Wiltshire, circuit with Mr. John Pool. Himself told me the following anecdote. Mr. Pool was well known to Mr. Whitefield; and, having met him one day, he accosted him in the following manner:—

WHITEFIELD. Well, John, art thou still a Wesleyan?

POOL. Yes, sir; and I thank God that I have the privilege of being in connection with Mr. Wesley, and one of his preachers.

WHITEFIELD. John, thou art in thy right place. My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected; and my people are a rope of sand.

And what now remains of this great man's labor ? Scarcely any thing. Multitudes were convinced under his ministry, and are gone to God ; but there is no spiritual succession. The tabernacle near Moorfields, the tabernacle in Tottenham-court road, and one in Bristol, with what is called the little school in Kingswood, are all even of his places of worship that remain, and these are mere Independent chapels.”*

We shall close this part of our work with a reference to the high estimation in which the Wesleyan Methodists have always held the class meetings. In the annual address of their Conference to their societies in Great Britain, August, 1825, we have the following : “ We more especially enjoin upon you, in the Lord, a diligent and conscientious attendance at your class meetings. It is these blessed institutions which so constantly respect the end of all preaching and of all religious profession—the work of God in the heart ; that the blind are led in the right way ; the penitent encouraged to the exercise of that faith in Christ whereby cometh salvation ; the tempted comforted ; and all urged forward by the counsels of experience and the prayers of those who are united in this interesting fellowship, to the mark for the prize of our high calling. Take heed, brethren, that ye forsake not this assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is. And, dear brethren, be watchful over your own hearts, even in the use of this searching and experimental means of grace, lest you fall into a careless and general manner of speaking of the state of your experience. Be intent upon growing in grace ; seek instruction from your leaders, by freely laying open the feelings of your hearts ; and thus let all the members

* Clark's Miscellaneous Works, as quoted in the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 1837, pp. 912-913.

seek the prayers and the sympathies of each other. It is thus that the communion of saints will be strengthened among you; and, by such simplicity of mind, you will derive from this communion increasing power and consolation.”*

* Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 1825, p. 690.

P A R T IV.

Objections and Excuses.

CHAPTER I.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

1. "THE institution of the classes is opposed to Christian liberty." This is the most popular objection urged against the institution, and we shall give it a most extended and impartial consideration, because its refutation places the institution upon a solid and immovable basis.

Spirituality lies at the foundation of Methodism in all its parts. Its inherent energy is wholly evangelical, and its experimental and practical efficiency originates in the simple, spiritual, and immutable principles of divine grace. It is a substantial revival of primitive apostolic power and spiritual freedom, without the encumbrance of the pompous forms, superstitious ceremonies, and worldly admixtures, that for ages, subsequently to the times of Christ and his apostles, smothered the celestial fire which they kindled, and subjected the church to the bondage of a lifeless formality. All its usages are simple, solemn, and impressive, requiring no other conformity, and imposing no other restraints, but those which the gospel enjoins or allows. Its many helps to a holy life are so many checks to lukewarmness and worldliness; and this is demonstrative of its evangelical purity and excellence. The restraints which it imposes, are not inconsistent with, but promotive of spiritual liberty in

the highest and holiest sense, which all enjoy who yield to those restraints. For, unquestionably, true spiritual liberty does not release from the observance of proper rites, and rules, and points of discipline ; nor from the denial of ourselves of worldly pleasures and in little things ; nor from proper restraints as to sleep, and food, and dress, amusements, conventional life, and popular feeling ; nor from bearing crosses ; nor from performing strictly religious duties ; and all these restraints and duties are imposed by the class meeting. And therefore the class meeting is not opposed to that true liberty which is the life of the Christian, but to that latitude which the inward corruption of the imperfect believer desires.

But to be more particular. That restraint, in a greater or less degree, is felt in the relation of religious experience in the class-room, is readily admitted. But is this restraint excessive ? Not at all ; but just such as would be felt anywhere else in giving a similar relation. It is a restraint involved in the nature of things, arising from the conflict between the remaining corruption of the human heart and a gracious sense of unworthiness and imperfection ; it is a timidity or pride of disposition to conceal the heart from others, because God has revealed so little of his love to us ; it is an infirmity which should be resisted ; it is a restraint of obligation which every Methodist should overcome, and which every happy Christian can easily overcome, and it is his duty to do it.

It has been said if we were less stringent in many things, and would dispense with class meetings especially, many excellent persons would join us instead of going to other denominations, and we would become the most popular church in the country. That is what we fear. The latitude allowed in other churches is what we oppose, and against which our "General Rules" are intended to guard us, and the class meeting to secure us. Let those who desire liberty

to be at ease in Zion, go elsewhere. Let them go where religious profession is cheapest; where there are fewest worldly pleasures to renounce, the lightest crosses to bear, the easiest labors to perform, the smallest sacrifices to make, and the least hardship for Christ's sake to endure. They would do us a great deal of harm, and themselves but little good. Without any fixed religious principles, they would soon involve the church in worldliness and lukewarmness; without any deep and permanent religious experience, they would soon crowd the church with backsliders in heart and life; without any invariable standard of practical piety, they would soon conform the church to popular tastes and prejudices; without any abiding interest in the purity and simplicity of the church, they would soon draw down upon us the reproaches of the world, and fail us in the day of trial; and crowding our courts by thousands, instead of urging on Methodism in its great work of revival in the world, they would stop every wheel in the whole machinery, and the Methodist Church, in a quarter of a century, as the Jewish, Roman Catholic, and English churches, in other ages, became corrupt, would also become corrupt; and, like them, need reformation and revival. Let Methodism, as it was, as it is, in its religious restraints, whatever new modes and usages may be adopted from time to time by the proper authority, remain till time is no more. In God's name, let it remain as inviolable and unchangeable as the eternal word. We know not the semblance of a substitute for the class meeting, and have never heard, and never expect to hear, in our day, of any desirable modification of it, much less to consent to its abrogation. In our judgment, at least, we would rather that excellent and well-disposed persons should join other churches, than we abolish or modify the class system, and sacrifice its inestimable advantages. We would rather, through its instrumentality, preserve what we have, and advance, if need be, but slowly, than by its abolition

obtain larger numbers, to whom then we could not extend the proper spiritual care, and so necessarily, to a great extent, must neglect the spiritual interest of the whole church. And as to persons of other persuasions, we would rather that they continue such, and maintain the doctrines of predestination and final perseverance; of apostolic succession and baptismal regeneration; of immersion and close communion, till time is no more, than we should expunge this one institution from Methodism. We would rather that all in our church who are now opposed to it should leave us, than we should give it up. If it has not made us what we are, it has contributed greatly to preserve us in our present state; and had we, as pastors, leaders, and members, observed this means of grace as we should have done, we would now be a thousand-fold better and mightier as a church than we are; and if we now observe it as we should, we shall increase inconceivably more rapidly in holy numbers and spiritual influence, than we would if we should abolish it, though we might obtain the largest accessions supposed in the objection.

But the objection, in fact, is founded upon an unwise policy in another respect. There are thousands of excellent persons who, from time to time, join us in view of the great advantages connected with the class meeting. Abolish the institution, and what becomes of these? And what will become of those who, now in the church, derive such unspeakable benefits from it? Abolish this distinguishing feature of Methodism, and who can estimate the extent of the lamentable results? No, no; we have no respect for the objection. Beside, we wish none to become Methodists but those who will submit to its wholesome and saving religious restraints, and support Methodism from its substantial and evangelical excellence; and then, in the language of Bishop Morris, "abide its results through weal and woe." In a word, the objection is founded in ignorance, or preju-

dice, or indisposition to submit to religious restraints; and hence it is not surprising that many well-disposed persons in other churches, and even young converts sometimes, should feel opposed to the class meeting. The class meeting can be properly estimated only by those who are acquainted with it, and if a knowledge of its great benefits cannot remove the prejudice, and overcome the indisposition, why our reasoning is at an end, and we must consent to let you go where you prefer, and we shall resolve to continue as we are.

2. "The institution of the classes is a popish ordinance." This is an objection of gross and shameful ignorance. The inquisitorial confession of Popery is made by a single person to a priest, in the absence of others, and under the conceit that the priest is invested with authority to forgive the sins confessed.* But in the classes, confession of several conjointly is made, not to a priest, but ordinarily to a layman, and to each other, in order to obtain mutual helps to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling" before God. No authority is assumed by the leader to forgive sin, no

* "Q. 76. What is confession ?

A. Confession is a particular discovery of all mortal sins to the priest, with all their circumstances that increase or diminish the sin, as far as can be called to mind, (*Concil. Trid. Sess. 14, c. 5*, and *Catch. ib. n. 48*;) without which neither forgiveness nor salvation is to be obtained. (*Trid. ib. can. 6, 7. Catch. n. 41.*)

Q. 77. Of what kind is the absolution which the priest grants upon confession ?

A. The absolution is not only declarative, but judicial; and the sentence pronounced by the priest is as if pronounced by the Judge himself, (*Concil. Trid. ib. c. 6*, and can. 9;) he perfecting what God causes. (*Catch. par. 2, 5, n. 17.*)

Q. What is the benefit of absolution ?

A. Although a sinner is not so affected with such grief for his sin as may be sufficient to obtain pardon; yet, when he has rightly confessed to a priest, all his sins are pardoned, and an entrance is opened into heaven. (*Catch. ib. n. 38.*)

conceit is entertained by the members of the class that he can forgive sin. Again: in the popish confession it is required that the most secret heart-sins be specified and disclosed, and the foulest and blackest crimes be therein secretly acknowledged to the priest, to be forgiven by him. In the classes all is open; general statements of Christian experience only are made, such as religious progress and comfort, or temptation to pride or unbelief; and if any actual sins or immoralities were acknowledged, the offender would be forthwith reported to the preacher, and formally arraigned, tried, and publicly expelled from the church. "These meetings are not, as some have supposed, inquisitorial; but their business is confined to statements of religious experience, and the administration of friendly and pious counsel."* A knowledge of the nature and advantages of class meetings, which we have already given, will be sufficient effectually to refute this horrid objection. A single visit to the class-room would do it. Methodism, in doctrine, experience, form, practice, and influence, from its origin till the present time, is one of the most powerful, open-faced, open-hearted organizations against Popery the world ever knew. We repeat, this objection is founded in ignorance of the true nature of the class meeting, and we add, in ignorance also of the nature of the popish confession.

3. "The observance of the class meeting is not essential to true Christian character and salvation, and therefore should not be made a condition of membership." This is the very strongest objection ever urged against the institution, but we think it may be easily refuted.

One of the most important questions that can engage the attention of civil legislators is that of right to citizenship; and so one of the most important questions that can engage the attention of those in authority in the church is that of right

* Watson's Life of Wesley, p. 96.

to church-membership. We have already, at much length, shown that the ministry are invested with authority to make prudential rules and regulations for the government of the church over which they preside: in all cases, however, most strictly in conformity to the general, plainly-revealed, and immutable principles of the Bible; and then such rules and regulations, adopted for the government of any particular church, are as obligatory upon its members as if they were specified and enjoined in the Bible. This second maxim of church-government cannot be rejected without assuming that an invariable form of church-government is definitely prescribed in the Bible, and that this form is suitable to all ages of the church: the one untrue in fact, and the other impossible in the nature of things. So necessary is this maxim, that the ablest writers and the best authorities have supported it in the most unequivocal language. "Among the important facts which we can collect and fully ascertain from the sacred historians, scanty, and irregular, and imperfect as are their records of particulars, one of the most important is *that very scantiness* and incompleteness in the detail, that absence of any full and systematic description of the formation and regulation of Christian commentaries; for we may plainly infer, from this very circumstance, the design of the Holy Spirit, that those details, concerning which no particular directions, accompanied with strict injunctions, are to be found in Scripture, were meant to be left to the regulation of each church, in each age and country."* "That all be done for edification and the common benefit of the church, doth noways restrain his church's freedom in disposing of itself as to the form of its government, so the aim of the church be for the better edification of the body of the church, and to promote the benefit of it." The same author: "In which sense I assert any particular form of government

* Whately's Apos. Suc. p. 80.

agreed on by the governors of the church, consonant to the general rules of Scripture, to be by divine right, *i. e.* God by his own laws hath given men a power and liberty to determine one particular form of church-government among them. And hence it may appear, that though one form of government may be agreeable to the word, it doth not follow that another is not; or, because one is lawful, another is unlawful: but one form may be more agreeable to some parts, places, people, and times than others are. In which case that form of government is to be settled which is most agreeable to the present state of a place, and is most advantageously conduicible to promoting the ends of church-government in that place or nation. The ground and reason of government in the church is unalterable *by divine right*; yea, and that very reason which determines the particular forms: but yet, those particular forms flowing from that immutable reason may be very different in themselves, and may alter according to the several circumstances of times, and places, and persons, for the more commodious advancing the main end of government."* "Hence, I conclude that it is lawful to continue, or even institute, rites and discipline not mentioned in Scripture, provided they be not opposed to the truths or principles of Scripture; for, if it be otherwise, all Christians, from the beginning, must have mistaken their own religion, and acted as the enemies of Christ."† "Those who found forms of government upon a divine right, do not plead a law in express terms, but such things from whence a divine right by law may be inferred."‡ "While the *principles*, in short, are clearly recognised and strongly inculcated, which Christian communities and individual members of them are to keep in mind and act upon, with a view to the great objects for which these communities were

* Stillingfleet's Irenicum, pp. 41, 42. † Palmer on the Church.

‡ Stillingfleet's Irenicum, p. 44.

established, the *precise modes* in which these objects are, in each case to be promoted, are left—one can hardly doubt, studiously left—undefined.”* “It is a most valuable part of that blessed *liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*, that, in his worship, different forms and usages may, without offence, be allowed, provided the substance of the faith be kept entire, and that, in every church, what cannot be clearly determined to belong to doctrine must be referred to discipline, and therefore, by common consent and authority, may be altered, abridged, enlarged, amended, or otherwise disposed of, as may seem most convenient for the edification of the people, ‘according to the various exigencies and occasions.’”† “It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be, in all places, one, or utterly alike; for at all times, they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s word.”‡ “Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification ;”§ which is a just and proper modification of the Thirty-fourth Article of the Church of England, and the Protestant Episcopal Church. “In perfect consistency with the above principle of common right—that of private judgment in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable—every Christian church, or union, or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed.”||

Thus, the Methodist Church has authority by divine right to institute such prudential regulations as shall be in con-

* Whately’s Apos. Suc. pp. 90, 91. † Pref. Prot. Epis. Prayer-Book.

‡ XXXIV. Art. Prot. Epis. Church. § XXII. Art. Meth. Epis. Church.

|| Presb. Confess. Faith.

formity to her character, and required to accomplish the great objects of her ministry, which is itinerant; and she has authority to require the observance of them, provided they be scriptural, under the penalty of exclusion. All evangelical churches, upon the same principle of divine right, have certain rules and regulations as conditions of membership, and what are binding upon one church are not binding upon another, unless adopted by it. And so what is enjoined by one church as essential to the true Christian character and salvation of its members must be observed by them as such ; provided it is substantially contained in the Bible, which, we have proved, is the nature of the classes. In a word, what is essential to the order, harmony, spirituality, usefulness, and existence of the Methodist Church, is essential to the true Christian character and salvation of its individual members; and such is the relation of the classes to the whole Methodistic economy. It holds a relation to the Methodist Church, essential and indispensable to the accomplishment of its work as an *itinerant* church; and without the proper observance of this institution by the members, the ministry have no satisfactory knowledge of their true Christian character, and can have none. This, we repeat, is the principal mode of determining spiritual character in the Methodist Church ; and those who are in the wilful and repeated neglect of class are generally considered as in a backslidden state. And until it can be shown, that the Methodist Church, in doctrine, discipline, and usage, is not substantially founded upon the Bible, the observance of the class meeting must be assumed as essential to the true Christian character and salvation of *Methodists*. Government implies obedience; and if the government of a church, the Methodist Church, for example, be founded on the Bible, then obedience of its members is essential to true Christian character and salvation. It is not pretended that a member of the Methodist Church could not be saved, should he leave

us, and join some other branch of the Christian church, for there are facilities enough in other evangelical churches to enable him to save his soul; but it is confidently affirmed that no one in the Methodist Church, or in any other evangelical church, can be saved unless he comply, in the proper manner, with the requisitions of his particular church. For not to do this, is to fail to do his duty as a *Christian*; and if he fail to do this he cannot be saved, unless he heartily repent before God, and obtain forgiveness for his neglect before he dies. Any other conclusion would imply, that it is not essential to salvation that any one join any branch of the Christian church; that it is a matter of utter indifference whether the believer join any church or not; that the obligation of no believer extends to a formal association with any Christian church at all; that the Christian church is not a divinely-authorized system of means of grace and salvation; that the Christian church affords no helps to the formation of a true Christian character and the salvation of man; that the Christian church is invested with no authority at all; that no system of church-government is obligatory upon Christians; and that a true Christian character may be acquired, and salvation be secured, *out* of the church as well as *in* it. To concentrate the refutation of the objection in a few words: If a believer wilfully and repeatedly neglect to observe the requisitions of the church of which he is a member, and at some time fail to associate himself with any other branch of the Christian church, he cannot form a true Christian character; he cannot be saved, unless he heartily repent, and obtain forgiveness, through the great mercy of God, before the close of his probationary state. Oh, if it be so difficult to be saved in the church, with all its helps, how can he be saved who wilfully and repeatedly neglects all those helps, or any of those helps? especially that one which is of the greatest service, and is the test of Christian character, as the class meeting is in the

Methodist Church? It is impossible, without repentance and forgiveness. Let all in the Methodist Church, who wilfully and repeatedly neglect their class, and imagine that they are nevertheless forming a true Christian character, and are in the sure and certain way of saving their souls, wake up from the vain delusion—and keep awake.

We say, vain delusion. Let us put the question to the test of experience. What progress have these vain objectors made in sound Christian experience—any at all—from the commencement of this wilful and repeated neglect? Examine the heart and life impartially. What preparation for trial? for death? for judgment? for heaven? When were they at a prayer-meeting? what enjoyment under the preaching of the word? what in private prayer? what in family prayer? what in Christian conversation? if they observe these means of grace, and discharge these duties regularly, or at all. What sacrifices do they make for Christ's sake? or what self-denial do they exercise? or crosses do they bear? or hardness do they endure? or strictly religious duties do they perform? or influence, as Christians, do they exert in the church, at home, and among men? What comfort in reading the Bible?—do they read it at all? or at the sacrament, if they observe it indeed but occasionally? or in revivals, except an occasional and transient quickening? or in the reception of God's providential goodness, except a common gratitude? What spiritual power have they to restrain the love of the world, except to appease the conscience with deceptive compromises? or to resist daily temptations, except to conquer but in part? or to discharge present and pressing religious obligations, except to resolve to do better by-and-by? Alas! what coldness! what deadness! what doubts! what fears! When the thunder rumbles from the pulpit through the church, *wo to them that are at ease in Zion!* the very text sounds like a death-knell to them!—a death-knell from the God they loved,

and to whose church they belong! Wo in life! wo in death! wo at the judgment! wo in hell! And are these souls forming a true Christian character, discharging the one great obligation that comprehends the whole life, with the action and the fire of the whole mind directed to the great objects of eternity, severally independent of life's endless fluctuations, and sustained by Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever?" No; but they are souls so exhausted of their early religious life as to be reduced now to the condition of sterility and weeds, with not a green leaf remaining. These are the "tares;" and the angels of judgment will pluck them out from the "wheat." These are the "withered branches;" and the angels of justice will commit them to the burning. These are the "foolish virgins;" and their oil is gone out, and their sleep is deep in the church, and the Bridegroom, the blessed Lord Jesus, will shut them out of heaven. These are the Laodicean lovers of God, who say they "are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" and so they generally are in a worldly sense—and that is all they care about heartily and sincerely; but they "are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness," will "spew them out of his mouth." May repentance avert the terrible and evil day!

But farther: (1.) This objection is not made by an exemplary Christian, in the strict sense of the word; for such a Christian is faithful in attending to this means of grace; and hence the *fact* is wanting to support the objection. (2.) Exemplary Christians—that is, those who are either acquainted with the deep things of God, or are earnestly and faithfully seeking them—are the first to condemn themselves for the neglect of class meeting; because in it they find so many advantages and helps of a spiritual kind; and they would consider it extremely inconsistent with their expe-

rience and sense of duty, to neglect a single meeting without just and sufficient excuse, such as sickness, distance, or unavoidable business. (3.) The objection is, in fact, an admission that a faithful and proper observance of this institution insures an exemplary life and final salvation. Why, then, as these are the great *objects* of the Christian, should any Methodist *desire* to excuse himself for neglecting his class altogether? It will be difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile an ardent and increasing desire to be saved, such as a truly exemplary Christian always feels, with any rational and religious opposition to the class meeting. If such prejudice does exist, a knowledge of the nature and benefits of the class meeting will remove it, and the objection vanishes away. (4.) If you were an exemplary Christian, in heart and life, and all manner of conversation, as a Methodist you would feel no disposition to urge this objection another moment. (5.) It is not pretended that there are no exemplary Christians in other churches, who, if faithful, will finally be saved; but it is affirmed that no one in our church, who wilfully and habitually neglects his class meeting, can ever be eminent for piety either in heart, or life, or death. (6.) Nor is it pretended that the habitual negleeter of class meetings cannot finally be saved; but it is affirmed that the life of all such will be rough and doubtful, and, even with a late repentance, death ordinarily be unblest with the abundant consolations of divine grace. (7.) The Methodist who seldom or never meets with his class, if he be any thing, cannot be more than a weak and solitary Christian, whatever may be his influence for consistency of character, amiability, liberality, talents, and usefulness in advancing the temporal business of the church;—weak, because he knows so little of spiritual things himself, that he can extend but little spiritual help to others; ever complaining of his want of faith, and hope, and love, and zeal, he rather needs help from others, which he declines to

seek in the class meeting; and solitary, because failing to associate with those little social companies, the classes, who unite their counsels, their sympathies, their courage, their strength, and their prayers, to aid one another in pursuing the journey of life through the dangerous wilderness, he resolves to walk *alone* all the way. (8.) This objection is a death-blow struck at a most important-institution of the Methodist Church. If the objection be valid and true, then this institution may be wholly abolished; for why retain what is no longer required? But is it indeed no help? has it no advantages? and may Methodists be as holy and useful without as with this favorite and peculiar means of grace? Then it imposes a heavy and useless burden, and should not continue another hour in force. But not one word of this is true, as the history of the institution demonstrates. Suppose every other Methodist were to adopt your opinion and practice on this subject, in how short a time would the whole church be utterly shorn of its strength!

4. "Other evangelical denominations have not the class meeting in their systems of church-government, who nevertheless are evangelical, and why should the Methodist Church be peculiar in this respect? That is, why should one evangelical church consider that essential in church-government which other evangelical churches do not consider as such?"

If this objection be admitted, then *uniformity* is the only sound principle of church-government, and where then shall we commence, and where shall we stop? What evangelical church shall be taken as the standard of all the rest? or what modifications shall be made in each to effect the uniformity? The thing is impossible. It is not only impossible, but it is unnecessary. Uniformity in essential doctrine and experience is all that is necessary, no matter how the external forms and modes answerable to maintaining evangelical doctrine and experience may vary in various churches.

Again: *entire* uniformity in doctrine and experience is not to be regarded as essential to the evangelical union of the churches. It is not difficult to determine the bounds within which uniformity may be determined, and churches claiming to be evangelical may be recognised, and beyond which, sects claiming to be evangelical, should be excluded as heretical. Any church maintaining the fundamental doctrines and experience of evangelical Christianity, with an external form of government in accordance with the "decency and order" required in the Bible, is to be recognised as evangelical, though it may not embrace the entire doctrine and experience revealed in the Bible. In these there may be degrees of difference in evangelical churches, though not sufficient to prevent a general and helpful uniformity. Thus, other churches maintain the doctrine of the indirect, but not the direct witness of the Spirit: the Methodist Church maintains both. Other churches maintain the doctrine of the new birth, but not the possibility of entire sanctification, or removal of the in-being of sin, till death: the Methodist Church maintains both the doctrine of regeneration, and the possibility of sanctification at any time before death. Certain churches maintain the doctrine of a limited atonement: the Methodist Church maintains the salvable condition of all men. In these, as prominent examples, there is a difference only in the extent of faith and experience; and as Methodists we believe these churches go far enough to be regarded as evangelical. Again: certain churches maintain the doctrine of infallible final perseverance: the Methodist Church maintains the doctrine of the possibility of falling from grace; but they do not consider the former doctrine sufficient of itself to exclude those who maintain it from the family of evangelical churches. Again: a certain church maintains the doctrine of a regular, unbroken episcopal succession from the apostles as essential to the constitution of the Christian church and ministry:

the Methodist Church and other churches do not maintain the doctrine ; and yet, though excluded themselves by that church, as destitute of this essential characteristic of the church of Christ, they do not consider the maintainance of this dogma as sufficient to exclude her from the family of evangelical churches. Again : other evangelical churches are under the pastoral care of a settled ministry : the Methodist Church prefers that of an itinerant ministry ; yet this does not disturb the general harmony, or hinder a uniformity in the great work of evangelizing the world. Now the argument is this : as the Methodists maintain a higher spiritual life, and the possibility of falling from grace, and are under the pastoral care of an itinerant ministry, it is natural that they should feel the necessity of instituting such prudential regulations as correspond to their peculiar views and peculiar nature. They have adopted prudential regulations different from those adopted by other churches to cover the advanced ground which they occupy, and guard against the dangers to which they see themselves exposed. Such, for example, is the prudential institution of the classes ; and they regard this as prudential in the strictest and highest sense, because it is designed to promote experimental religion to the highest degree possible in this life and to guard in the best manner possible against declension and backsliding in religion ; as must appear evident from a reference to the discussion of the "Nature, Obligation," and "Benefits" of the institution contained in this treatise. The difference, then, in these respects, between the Methodist Church and other churches, is one reason why they have not incorporated the class meeting in their government. But the principal reason, just now alluded to, is this :

Other churches are not constituted externally as ours is. Other churches are local, and the government must be organized accordingly : ours is itinerant, and the government must be organized accordingly. The object of both is

fundamentally the same—the salvation of men. We accomplish that object in our way; they in their way. They do without the class meeting; we employ it. They think they can do without it; we think we cannot do without it. They think they can accomplish the great objects of a local ministry without it; we think we cannot accomplish the great objects of an itinerant ministry without it. The difference in the character of our ministry renders the class meeting necessary to us. And yet it is very probable, if not certain, that the adoption of the class meeting, or something substantially the same, would greatly aid them in their work,* which greatly strengthens our argument for the institution. That is, what they ought to have, we have; or what they need not, we need: in the latter case, because they have it not, is no reason why they should not have it;

* And yet other denominations greatly need some such social regulation; and a large portion of them, who understand and feel a deep interest in the spirituality of their churches, generously and frankly admit the fitness and wisdom of the Methodist institution of the classes. "An influential member of the Congregational Church, who was strongly attached to that people, and had been as strongly opposed to the Methodists until an acquaintance with them removed his prejudices, said to me, 'I admire your social meetings, especially your class meetings; by that means you become acquainted with each other's spiritual state, which not only prepares you to sympathize with, and labor for each other, but also cultivates brotherly love, and affords an opportunity to encourage and 'exhort one another,' as the Bible commands.' And, said he, 'I tell my brethren that we greatly need some such social means of grace, for we know nothing of the spiritual state of the members of the church, except that we see them at church and the communion; and how can we labor together; it is impossible.'"† An intelligent Episcopal minister with emphasis acknowledged to the author of this treatise, that "a similar institution was needed in his own church, to improve the spirituality of its members, and unite them more closely in spiritual union." Mr. Wesley felt this in Church of England, and he supplied the need, and the Methodist Church in England and America perpetuated it; and may it never be abandoned!

† Reasons for Becoming a Methodist. p. 121.

and in the former case, because they, as a *local* ministry, ought to have it, is a stronger reason why we, as an *itinerant* ministry, should use it. And so the argument is turned point-blank against the objection. That is, the class meeting, indispensable as it is to the work of an itinerant ministry, would be useful to a local ministry; and therefore a local ministry should adopt and practise it. But whether the class meeting would be useful or not to a local ministry, is immaterial. It is indispensable to a work of an itinerant ministry, and this is another reason why the Methodists are peculiar in adopting and practising it.

But further: why should the class meeting be selected as objectionable because of its peculiarity? Upon the abstract ground of peculiarity the same objection might be made to our Love-Feasts, General Superintendency, Itinerancy, Presiding-Eldership, General and Annual Conferences, modes of church-trial, and so on. But does this prove any of these unwise or inconsistent with Scripture? Not at all. It does not follow, because the external forms of other churches are right, admitting them to be right, that ours is wrong; or because theirs answer well for them, that ours will not answer as well for us, to effect the great objects of the gospel. Why should other external church-governments be made the standard by which to determine the nature of ours, or what ours should be? Why may not ours be made the standard for them in these respects? They have the test of centuries by which to determine the wisdom and efficiency of theirs, and we, let it be observed, have had but little more than a single century to determine the wisdom and efficiency of ours; and, as it is admitted on all hands, by the grace of God, we are in advance of all of them, and our march is still onward. And here we turn the tables again: experiment proves the superior wisdom and efficiency of our church-government, and therefore it should rather be made the standard for modifications in the government

of other churches, than theirs should be made a standard for us.

5. "The requisition to attend class should be so modified as to leave attendance optional with the members of the church." This is a concession, at least, that the institution is in some sense profitable and expedient, which is a great point gained. But this does not cover the whole ground: we regard it as a church regulation solemnly obligatory, and in the highest sense profitable. Optional to attend! then the very design of the institution were thwarted; for this would be making provision for its universal neglect; and then the evils which it is intended to prevent would follow, and the benefits which it is intended to insure would be lost to the church. Remove the restraints of obligation to attend class, and timidity, discouragement, coldness, dulness, temptation, inconvenience of any kind, and a thousand other opposing causes, would be sufficient, in most cases, to incline the will to neglect attendance, and in a short time, this inestimable regulation would sink into universal neglect. Even now, with the restraints of obligation imposed and acknowledged, how few of the vast family of Methodism attend! Remove these, and the results may be foreseen and portrayed with prophetic certainty. Unbounded license given, it would be taken, and the class meeting everywhere, as it now is in some places, would be a matter of cold indifference and occasional observance. A few might cheerfully attend for a while, but these would soon go to their reward, and the class meeting become obsolete, as the "Bands" did, and like them,* be formally expunged from the discipline as no longer of use, and then the path to other alterations, if not entire revolution, would be open. We hesitate not

* The "Bands," with every thing on the subject of them, was expunged from the discipline at our last Gen. Conf., 1854. May God so revive the church as to cause their restoration!

to express again our conviction that the Methodist Church will flourish or decline as the class meeting is observed or disregarded; and hence we cannot consent to any modification of the institution that would encourage its neglect, and so promote the downfall of that church which now, through the blessing of God, it contributes so much to uphold and advance.

6. Another objection is, "There is no Scripture for these classes." We have already considered at length the scriptural authority for them, and shall here only add, in the language of Mr. Wesley: "(1.) There is no Scripture against them. You cannot show one text that forbids them. (2.) There is much Scripture for them; even all those texts which enjoin the substance of those various duties whereof this is only an indifferent circumstance, to be determined by reason and experience. (3.) You seem not to have observed, that the Scripture, in most points, gives only general rules; and leaves the particular circumstance to be adjusted by the common sense of mankind. The Scripture, for instance, gives that general rule, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' But common sense is to determine, on particular occasions, what order and decency require. So, in another instance, the Scripture lays it down as a general, standing direction: 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' But it is common prudence which is to make the application of this, in a thousand particular cases."* If the Scriptures substantially, reason, experience, common sense, and common prudence do not support this institution of the Methodist Church, then we must yield to the objection; but if they do, (and that they do, none with a proper knowledge of the institution can honestly deny,) then the objection falls to the ground.

* Wesley's Works, vol. v. pp. 180, 181.

7. Others object, "The thing is well enough in itself. But the leaders are incompetent for the work: they have neither gifts nor graces for such an employment." Admitting this to be true, whenever it does occur, unqualified leaders should be removed, and suitable ones be appointed. The want of qualification in an officer to discharge the appropriate business of his office, does not annul the authority or disprove the importance of the office; and hence, while improper leaders should be removed, and suitable ones be appointed, it is the duty of all to meet with their class till this be done, or join some other class, if this be not or cannot be done. And yet the advantages of meeting in class are not confined wholly to the care of the leader, whether qualified to instruct properly or not; but depend for the most part upon faithful self-examination, reflection, meditation, humble communion with God, and the relation of Christian experience given by other members of the class, which is often most encouraging to one in trial, or under temptation, or "hungering and thirsting after righteousness." Independently of the leader, the advantages of the class are so great, that any one exercising the proper spirit may derive much spiritual profit from it, though the leader possess but a small amount of gifts and graces, while it is admitted that the profit would be greatest, if leaders best qualified were, or could always be, appointed. But this cannot always be done, and we should always be content with the best that can be done, when, such leaders as they are, it is plain God blesses their labor. Beside, faithful leaders will improve by experience and observation, and in time may be what you desire. But after all, the remedy is at hand: if your leader be unqualified, tell your pastor, and, if it be practicable, he will exchange him for a better, or remove you to the charge of a better. And yet the inquiry is at least admissible, Do you not rather object to meeting in class, than to the leader? If not, and a better leader cannot be obtained, you ought

to be satisfied with your present leader, and so agree to share with your class in its want of such a leader as you desire. Meantime, probably you ought to be a leader, for so it would seem, from the want of ability in others to teach you.

8. "There are many in these classes who are a reproach to the church, and with them I cannot consent to meet." The fact is admitted, and the existence of it regretted; but your conclusion by no means follows.

(1.) Among the twelve apostles there was a treacherous Judas, and an unfaithful Peter. Ananias and Sapphira were in the church in its purest state. In the church at Corinth there were those who dishonored their holy profession. St. Paul wept while writing to the church at Philippi (his favorite church) respecting many whose life was disorderly, and "whose end was destruction." Christ exhorted and admonished the church at Ephesus to return to their "first love," and found but few in the church at Sardis whose "garments were unspotted." In civil government there are many who are disobedient, and in political, many who are traitors. In the currency of the country, there is much of counterfeit coin and paper. Among men there are many who are guilty of extravagance and intemperance. Yet shall these cause us to decline all the advantages of Christian fellowship, and all the privileges of civil and political government, and all the benefits of a sound currency, and all the blessings of frugality and temperance?

(2.) The treachery of Judas, and the unfaithfulness of Peter, did not discharge the rest of the apostles from obligation to Christ; nor did the unfaithful in Corinth, and Philippi, and Sardis, release the faithful in those churches from responsibility to continue in them, and observe the regulations imposed by the apostles. Personal obligation yet remained to them in all its original force. Every Christian stands or falls to God alone. *My* duty to God

and his church loses none of its force in consequence of the improprieties and crimes of *others*.

(3.) If neglect to meet with such persons in class were enough to vindicate *my* character and reputation, is it enough to vindicate the honor of God? Should I not have more regard for the honor of God than for my own reputation? though this is not the proper statement of the question; for in vindicating the honor of God, I defend my own. Yet the objection proceeds upon the supposition, that my reputation only is involved in the case, while as a Christian my reputation sinks or rises with the honor of God; and if required, I should consent to be of no reputation, in a worldly sense, for Christ's sake.

(4.) But the evil complained of may be removed. Persons of immoral lives, after the proper trial, should be expelled from the church. The honor and prosperity of the church require this, and every well-regulated church will see that this be done.

9. "I cannot speak my experience before those who have more knowledge and grace than I have." You should not confound natural timidity and reserve with a modest courage, or suppose that this infirmity is inconsistent with a proper dignity of deportment. The reluctance to speak before those who have made superior attainments in the knowledge of divine things, should be subdued by the hope of obtaining instruction from them. But this is not a question of ordinary propriety, but one of duty and privilege—a duty binding upon all the class alike—a privilege belonging to all alike; and it is sinful to neglect the duty, and unwise to abuse the privilege. Beside, your principal object in joining the class should have been to *learn*, and not to *teach*; and you cannot be taught till your case is known, and you should be content to be a learner till you can become a teacher. Finally, may not pride, and not a sense of propriety, be at the foundation of this objection?

Having but little knowledge of divine things, are you not unwilling to confess it? If it be pride, then it is a great evil to be subdued, and duty now is plain and imperious. If it be pride, cut the matter short, and resist, overcome it. If it be pride, you can go no farther till it is resisted and overcome. If it be pride, you will lose the little knowledge you have, till it is resisted and subdued. If it be pride, you will certainly be lost finally and eternally, unless you resist and subdue it. And here is the test: Are you silent on subjects with which you are familiar, and which are congenial to you? such as your favorite opinions, your occupation, your plans, your property, your successes, your amusements, your friends, your connections, and your worldly prospects? Or, in matters of great temporal importance, do you permit a consciousness of ignorance or inexperience to restrain you from seeking from others the required information? Would you rather rush headlong into imminent danger, and proudly perish, than seek a way of certain escape and safety? Should the child be too proud to be guided by his parent? or the pupil to be instructed by his teacher? or the soldier to be directed by his general? or the blind man to be lead by a friend? or the dying man to take the healing medicine? or the starving man to receive the restoring food? May God graciously help you to make a proper and useful application of these illustrations!

10. Some are ashamed to speak of their religious feelings before company. This may be true of many worthy young members, but this also is an infirmity which it may be difficult at first to overcome. But does a weakness of this nature justify silence in any one, on any subject, when he should speak, especially on the great subject of experimental religion, in which every Christian is so deeply interested, and on which, it is expected, every Christian has something to say? The sense of duty should triumph over

the sense of weakness or timidity. Introduced into new associations, and called upon to engage in new exercises, and to relate an experience wholly new, it is not surprising that some should feel a sense of timidity upon their first entrance into the class-room. But this will soon subside; and, to the most timid, the service of the class meeting will soon become a delightful exercise. Make the trial, and never stop till this weakness is subdued. Indeed, this objection is for the most part imaginary. A single sentence uttered in the discharge of duty, and God ordinarily gives such a blessing that timidity is at once forgotten, and great liberty is enjoyed, which would be a pleasant way to refute this objection?

Why should you object to communicate your experience in the presence of religious friends? Men of real delicacy and worth, under the impulse of virtuous motives, have not hesitated to write and publish their varied experience to the world. In all ages of the church, faithful and pious men, by epistolary correspondence, have communicated the whole of their religious states to each other; and the pages of church history are adorned with an infinite variety of spiritual letters. Perhaps you are in constant correspondence with religious friends on the various and important subjects of your own religious experience. The Bible is pre-eminently a book of this nature. The practice is congenial to moral friendship and social piety. Why, then, should you object to avowing and disclosing your religious feelings to religious friends, accompanied with all the endearments of spiritual fellowship, which is more pleasing and advantageous than is possible by letter? Indeed, you do not object to religious conversation occasionally with a single friend: why, then, object to the weekly classes, which afford a greater variety of cases, and furnish you with the double privilege of saying but little and hearing much; of telling your own experience and hearing that of many others?

11. "I am not worthy to meet with the people of God in such holy fellowship." A sense of unworthiness entitles you to the privilege, and this fear will lead you to pray the more earnestly for divine help, and incline you to receive the more cheerfully and promptly the instructions and counsels of the leader and the more experienced members of the class.

12. Others honestly say, "I do not know why; but I do not like class meetings." And you never will find a satisfactory reason to justify your indisposition to them. Is it rational—can you ever be contented—to leave a solemn question of duty unsettled in this manner? Do you know why you are a Methodist? If you do, then a moment's consideration will convince you why you should meet with your class, though at first you should not like to do it. There is the same reason why you should discharge one duty as another; and mere dislike, especially when there is no intelligible and satisfactory reason to justify it, can never be a sufficient ground for neglecting any duty. In the act of joining the Methodist Church, you solemnly pledged yourself to observe all its requisitions and attend to all its means of grace, having at the time prominently before your mind the class meeting, which is a peculiar and distinguishing institution of Methodism. Mere dislike does not annul the obligation you then assumed. What then? Your dislike becomes the occasion to take up a cross, from which you should never shrink, but bless God for it: for, in taking it up, he will bless you under it.

There are several other objections, such as, "I do not wish to be hypocritical;" "Many, who give a flaming experience, are hypocritical;" "Religious feelings are too sacred to be revealed to others;" and such like—all of which are too trivial to demand a moment's consideration; and we pass to the examination of excuses for the neglect of class meetings.

CHAPTER II.

EXCUSES EXAMINED.

OBJECTIONS are urged by those who oppose class meetings; excuses are made by those who acknowledge their obligation to attend them, and are given in extenuation of failure to do so.

1. "I cannot speak as well as others." All cannot speak with the same ease and freedom, and some are endowed naturally with a better elocution than others. It is simplicity and truth, and not a fine and eloquent speech, that we expect in class meeting; and hence illiterate people, ordinarily, in a plain and unstudied manner, and such is always the language of the heart, succeed better in relating what God has done for their souls than those who express themselves in more intelligent and elegant phrases. In a manner new and peculiar to themselves, they relate the vices and miseries of their former lives; how they heard and received the gospel; how severly they suffered under conviction of sin; how they overcame their besetting sins and the devices of Satan; how the promises were applied; and how the love of God was shed abroad in their hearts; and all this is done with such an humble boldness and artlessness as cannot fail to interest and instruct intelligent believers. In these innocent people, taught of God, and incapable of hypocrisy, religion shines forth in its native beauty and power, and skepticism is refuted, and faith confirmed. They prove the authenticity of the Scriptures, not by the force of formal and learned arguments, but by the effect of the threatenings under which they have groaned

and shuddered, and the excellency of the promises whose sweetness they have enjoyed. They attempt no vindication of the miracles, nor defence of the divinity of Christ; but they evince his equality and glorification with the Father by the gift of the in-dwelling Comforter. They contend not for the divine authority of the Christian faith; but they demonstrate its omnipotence by its triumphs over themselves and the world, and its transforming effects in their own hearts. They pretend not to argue in support of the immortality of the soul; but they deduce the great truth from the blissful visions of the future state which divine grace inspires, and from the ennobling hope of being exalted to the image and presence of God, which is a daily fact in their experience. There is an interior, spiritual kingdom, ample, ever new, progressive, boundless, the work of the Holy Ghost, a universe of facts, as real, substantial, and as satisfactorily known to the consciousness of the true believer as the external, sensible, actual universe of facts, called the heavens and the earth, without us. These internal, spiritual facts of the Holy Ghost, the humble, simple, and illiterate can understand as easily and as well as the most intelligent Christians can, for they are the same in all true believers: as the sun is a great fact in the natural world, as clearly known to the illiterate as to the philosopher, so the love of God shed abroad in the heart is a great fact, as clearly known to the unlearned as to the wise believer. Thus, "The poor," says Christ, "have the gospel preached unto them;" and St. James says, "Has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" This is the great foundation and defence of Methodism, and the source of the experimental facts related in the classes. What has God done for you and in you? Speak of that, describe that, in your own language, just as you describe in your own language what he has done in the natural world.

2. "I have not time for its regular observance." What! not one hour in seven days, and that hour sometimes on the Sabbath day? One hour in seven days spent in Christian fellowship is but a small proportion; and that man is worldly-minded who will not give that small amount to the spiritual exercises of the class meeting, who is unwilling to devote so small a proportion of his time to the examination of his soul and religious communion with his brethren. The duties of religion require the use of time, and therefore the claims of secular life should not be permitted to consume all our time. Again: the obligation to discharge strictly spiritual duties, and the obligation to attend to secular duties, are not in conflict: you are responsible for both; both will enter into the final account, and make out the final sentence. What! will you give all your life to the acquisition of a fortune, and scarcely one whole hour at a time to the salvation of your soul? Cannot a sense of duty arrest your impetuosity? Cannot a sense of violated obligation do it? Must you wait for sickness to do it? Can death alone do it? Not one hour in seven for your soul, for God, for death, for judgment, for eternity, to escape hell, and prepare for heaven! Oh, this is mournful, it is dreadful! but it is not surprising that you are well nigh, if not altogether, a backslider in heart as well as life. What account will you give to God for these lost hours? how will you justify yourself before him for all this hurry in the world? When time with you is ended, and you are lost, what then? Not a soul in hell can lift his hands and say, "I had not time to save myself," for he had not time for any thing else.

3. "I have company or expect company this hour." You should not have made engagement for company at this hour, because you had an antecedent engagement to meet with the people of God at this very time, which is of a very weighty character. Must God waive his rights to permit

you to wait on your friends? Must God release you from waiting on him, lest your friends should take it ill should you fail to wait on them? Will he permit you to waste your time in conventional compliments and courtesies, when you should be employed in holy fellowship with him and his people? However, the expected company, if it be worthy of your respect, upon finding you absent from home, will admire you more for your consistency of character, as a Christian, than they would have done for any reception you might have given them; and so they will admire you the more, should you excuse yourself from them when the hour for class meeting has arrived, than they would have done had you remained, and thus have neglected a solemn and religious duty. Many professors of religion think more of receiving and paying fashionable visits than they do of the duties and privileges of religious intercourse, and feel more sensibly condemned when they neglect to return the visits of friends and acquaintance, than when they neglect, though it be for many months or years, the obligations of religion; and they feel a higher degree of satisfaction in paying off old visits, that had daily oppressed their conscience, than they do in observing some long-neglected means of grace. For them the parlor has more charms than the church, and fashionable life more interest than duty to God; and so it is easy to sacrifice the latter to the former, and to invent specious excuses for indulging in the one and neglecting the other. But this is an evidence of a worldly spirit, which cannot be indulged in for a moment, or in a single instance, without a sensible loss of religious comfort, and, finally, of all vital godliness. True refinement, however, never demands the neglect of a single religious duty, and is not inconsistent with the highest religious attainments. If religion should shine anywhere it is in the parlor, and surely the parlor is not the place where religion should be considered as subordinate, or from which, by Christians especially, it

should be excluded as a matter of politeness. How vain the excuse, then, that mere common politeness requires legitimately the abrogation or even the suspension of religious obligation. That which demands this of the Christian is not true politeness, but is a morbid conventional taste, a fascinating corruption of good manners, hostile alike to social happiness and vital piety. In a word, religion hallows and elevates social life, and whatever tends to degenerate religion must impair social life; and wherever there is an alternative between the maxims and customs of fashionable society, and the plain and standing requirements of religion, duty imperiously demands that we scrupulously preserve our Christian integrity and consistency.

4. "My business demands my attention this hour." That may be, and you are excusable whenever this is so. But it must be unavoidable business, for nothing less than this renders you excusable. See you to that. Religion does not require the neglect of your business, but a faithful attention to it. Nor should your business cause you to neglect your religion. Neither need be neglected, and you should make such an arrangement of your time and plans as to be able to give to each its due proportion of attention. Do this, and both business and religion will flourish in admirable harmony. If possible, never let there be any conflict.

5. "Distance renders it exceedingly inconvenient for me to attend my class meeting regularly." That may be, too. But is distance regarded as an insurmountable obstacle in secular things, which are matters of inferior importance? Where there is a will there is a way, if a way is possible. Is it possible to meet with your class? Then attend when you can; the advantage of attendance will more than repay you for all the trouble endured in overcoming the inconvenience. Is the present arrangement to meet in class the best that can be made? Then you must put up with it,

or lose the advantages of class meeting altogether. But if a more convenient arrangement can be made, let it be done, (and there is no reason why it should not be done,) and, if you can secure this arrangement, you are responsible for the neglect of class meeting till it is made. In the stations this excuse is rarely tenable. In the circuits it is sometimes different, but even here ordinarily it is as convenient to attend class as it is to attend preaching, and then the excuse for neglecting preaching would be as good as it is for neglecting class meeting. In both circuits and stations, in most cases, the inconvenience really exists rather in the *heart* than in the distance from the church or the class-room: it is rather a contest with *self* than with external circumstances. Where this is so, no one can conscientiously plead this excuse.

6. "I must take some time to visit other churches beside my own, and this often occurs when my class meets." This is an excuse of the circuits, and is easily answered. Your church first, especially your class meeting; and then, when convenient, you are at liberty to visit other churches. Every thing in its order. You cannot cancel one duty by discharging another. Particular and standing duties cannot be set aside by remote and general causes. It may be agreeable and profitable occasionally to visit other churches, but this should never be done when obligation calls you to class, and when your own church is justly entitled to your influence. The order of the church, in which is consulted the spiritual profit of all its members, cannot be violated without producing some confusion; and the occasional avoidable neglect of class meeting, tends greatly to divest it of its importance. Ordinarily more spiritual profit is derived from the class meeting than from the public exercises of preaching in our own church, with which we are so familiar; and consequently far more can be derived from this means of grace than is possible from the public services of other churches, with

which we are not so familiar. An idle curiosity, a worldly spirit, may impel you to neglect class meeting in this case: see you to that. A sense of duty may urge you to the class, but indisposition to yield may be confounded with a supposed propriety of attending divine service elsewhere this time, and so also the next time, till, under the specious pretence of charitable communion with sister churches, the class meeting is abandoned entirely. The question can be settled in a moment: if you have no compunctions of conscience on the subject, if you conscientiously believe that you can glorify God better, and improve your spiritual condition more, by neglecting your class in this manner, then you are justified in doing it; if not, then the path of duty is plain: meet with your class punctually and regularly.

“In the evening,” says Mr. Wesley, “I returned to Norwich. Never was a poor society so neglected as this has been for the past year. The morning preaching was at an end; the bands suffered all to fall in pieces; *and no care at all taken of the classes, so that whether they met or not, it was all one; going to church and sacrament were forgotten; and the people rambled hither and thither as they listed.* On Friday evening I met the society, and told them plain, I was resolved to have a *regular* society or none. I then read the rules, and desired every one to consider whether he was willing to walk by those rules or no. *Those, in particular, of meeting their class every week, unless hindered by distance or sickness, (the only reasons for not meeting which I could allow,) and being constant at church and sacrament.*”*

7. “But I can meet with my preacher when he visits the class, and it makes not much difference if I fail to meet regularly with my leader.” This is also an excuse of the circuits. But the preacher may not come regularly; and

* Wesley’s Works vol. iv. p. 427.

when he does come, he may not be disposed to meet the class, or he may be so taken up with other matters that he has not time to attend to this duty; or he may neglect to meet the class under the belief that the leader has attended to his duty; and thus you neglect the leader, and the preacher neglects you. Beside, upon your plan, a fundamental principle of the Methodist Church, the very principle upon which the classes are founded, is violated. It has already been shown that the system of the classes is essential to the efficiency and success of an *itinerant* ministry, and such is our ministry. Thus, the frequent and necessary absence of the pastor to visit other portions of his circuit, requires the aid of the leaders to oversee the flock at the very time you fail to meet your class. That is, all the advantages of class meeting in the absence of the pastor you voluntarily forego, and are content with the discharge of but half your duty, probably not even that. You might just as well neglect to meet with your pastor in class, as with your leader; for the duty to attend is the same in both cases, and unspeakable advantages are derived from both. The disposition to neglect duty in one case indicates a disposition to neglect it in the other: it may be you do both. It may be there are two preachers appointed to your circuit, and you may meet in class with but one of these; and then at most you do not meet in class more than eight or ten times in twelve months, and probably not half that number. Indeed, *when* were you at class? Do you meet in class with the preacher at all? do you meet with the leader at all? I fear not.

But this is not all. It is more profitable to meet with the leader than with the preacher, because you have more time for the exercises of the class meeting, such as self-examination, instruction, exhortation, prayer, and praise. And then you will be the better prepared to meet in class with your pastor when he visits your part of the circuit. The leader

will be able to give a most favorable report of you to him. The leader will be encouraged; the pastor will be encouraged; the other members of the class will be encouraged; the church generally will be encouraged, and point to you as an example; you will be encouraged, and God will greatly bless you in time of trouble, in life, and in death. Finally, it is a much better evidence of sincerity, consistency, zeal, devotion to the church, and deep piety, to meet in class regularly with your leader, than occasionally with your pastor, because then the ordinary motives to meet and mingle with the general congregation when the preacher comes cannot be the reasons that induce you to meet with the humble and pious few who assemble with the leader solely for religious objects.

8. "But if I attend faithfully to all the other means of grace connected with the church, I may, without much loss, occasionally neglect my class." In the first place, do you faithfully attend to all the other means of grace? Do you ever neglect, without sufficient cause, the preaching of the word? Do you ever neglect the sacrament of the Lord's supper, whether it is administered monthly, as in the stations, or quarterly, as it is ordinarily done on the circuits? Do you ever neglect the weekly preaching, whether in the stations or on the circuits? Do you read the Bible regularly and devotionally? Do you observe the regular public prayer-meetings? Do you faithfully observe private prayer? and if the head of a family, do you ever omit, without a good reason, the morning and evening social service, family prayer? Do you ever fast, either ~~weekly~~, or preparatory to the quarterly meeting, or in time of temptation, or at all? Do you ever meditate long, and deeply, and with delight upon spiritual things? for meditation is a means of grace. Do you ever subject your heart to a severe and honest examination? and self-examination is a means of grace. Do you ever converse with pious friends upon holy things, the

hopes and the joys of the Christian ? and conversation is a means of grace. Do you ever exercise self-denial in repressing the glowing ardor of a worldly spirit ? and the exercise of self-denial is a means of grace of singular advantage. If you are in the regular discharge of all these duties, then you are the last man in the church of God to make the excuse under consideration. To you the class meeting should have heightened and peculiar charms, and, of all men, you should be among those who hold the class meeting in the highest estimation. There is a plain and irreconcilable contradiction in the terms of the excuse. Secondly, consistently with the nature of the Methodist Church, you cannot be all that the excuse assumes, and at the same time habitually neglect the class meeting. Though you observe faithfully every others means of grace, you cannot, without great loss, neglect the class meeting. Supposing you have observed faithfully every other means of grace, you are not what you might have been, had you faithfully observed this means of grace. No matter what else you do as a Methodist, you can never become what you may be by the additional and proper observance of the class meeting. Take your experience. What progress have you made since neglect commenced ? Any sensible progress at all ? Compare your present state with what you were when just converted to God, or when your earliest attention was faithfully given to the class meeting. Did not every means of grace then glow with spiritual life and comfort ? Are they not now comparatively lifeless and comfortless to you ? Have you not already suffered a great and sensible loss in experimental religion ? Have you not fallen from your "first love ?" To what a dark depth have you fallen ? Thirdly, upon your principle, the class system might be abolished altogether, and then farewell to Methodism. Fourthly, if you are right, then the fathers and reflecting men of Methodism have been strangely mistaken in their estimate of the

importance of the class-system. Finally, the only assignable ground of your excuse, is a growing indifference to vital godliness, or a gradual declension in spiritual experience. May God rouse you as from the dead!

9. "I met with my class last week, and shall not attend this week." Then you wish to keep up a mere appearance of religion. To you the class meeting cannot have been productive of much profit, and never will be till you make its observance a regular service. And why should it not be so made? That which was right last week is right this week, and the same reason for attending last week continues this week. It is a *weekly* duty, and hence the discharge of duty one week cannot release you from duty the next week. The last week had, and the next week will have, the same claims as this, in this matter. Do you not need grace to help you this week, as you did last week? Is danger less, privilege less, responsibility less, this week, than they were last week? No, but increased; and therefore the necessity to attend class this week is more urgent than it was last week, and so must continue to be to the end of life. You might just as well say, I prayed yesterday morning, and therefore shall not pray this morning; or heard the word preached last Sunday, and therefore shall stay at home to-day; or received the sacrament at the last communion, and therefore shall not receive it at the next time; or read my Bible yesterday, and therefore shall not read it to-day; and so of every other means of grace. At this rate, it is easy to see that the preservation of order in the church would be impossible, and that the Christian profession would be a matter of but small importance. Religious responsibility would be greatly lessened, and the amount of backsliding in heart and life be incalculably great. Never give this excuse another moment's entertainment.

10. "It is too cold or too warm, or it is cloudy or rainy, and the streets or the roads are wet and muddy." Do these

difficulties stop you in matters of worldly pleasure or business? Not at all. And are not the the pleasures of religion, and the great business of the soul, confined to this fleeting life, of inconceivably greater magnitude? Would these trivial difficulties arrest you if life, property, or reputation were in jeopardy? Not at all. Why then should they be considered sufficient causes to justify the neglect of the incomparably greater interests of eternity, which are in imminent hazard every moment? But I put the question, Do you meet with your class when the weather and the circumstances are most favorable? Probably but seldom; it may be, never. What then? With no excuse for neglect in this case, you are ready to soothe the conscience with the most flimsy pretences in the other case. Any thing will answer for the purpose. I put the question again, Are you willing to vindicate yourself before God upon these grounds? Do they even really palliate the offence of neglect before your own conscience?

11. "I am slightly indisposed." Too much so to attend to worldly business or pleasure, or the ordinary duties of life? Then the excuse is valid; otherwise, it is insufficient. But I put the question, Do you meet with your class when you are in good health? Probably not often; it may be never. It is evident you have not formed the habit of regular attention to this means of grace. A profound regard for this means of grace cannot be affected by a slight indisposition. Age and infirmity are often found in the class-room celebrating the goodness of God, and rejoicing in the solace of his grace. Christian fellowship soothes and refreshes the body under the languor of disease, and it would, doubtless, contribute much to the removal of the indisposition of which you complain. Even a walk or a ride in the open air to the class-room might do something to relieve you. But it may be that your indisposition is of a constitutional or a chronic character, and so slight, gene-

rally, that you do not notice it particularly till the class-meeting day comes, and then it is suddenly aggravated into a serious complaint, which passes away, however, with the hour in which you should have met with your class. But how long have you been afflicted with this sickness? How often does it occur? How long does it ordinarily last? Does it leave you no time for class meeting? Are you on the sick list? Does your sickness cause you to lose a moment of time, or cost you a cent for medicine or for medical treatment? Do you report your indisposition to the class-leader as the cause of your absence? Does it detain you from church on Sunday, or from the company of your friends, or prevent your meeting your ordinary engagements with your fellow-men? Oh, no! Why, then, magnify it into a matter of so much consequence, when a plain and solemn duty demands but an hour's attention and not the least exposure? Get well from this hour, and never get sick again, unless you cannot help it.

12. "I can tell but the same old story, and hear but the same old advice from the leader, and the same old statements from the members." Very well; better this than nothing; better this than stay at home. If you obtain no instruction, the *spirit* of the class meeting is most salutary, and religious habits are of great value. You hear many sermons which afford you no instruction, and you often partake of the Lord's supper without any sensible spiritual profit, and engage in singing old familiar hymns and tunes in praise of God without any particular delight; and yet, for all this, you do not neglect or abandon them. But if, in all these instances, you exercised the proper spirit, you would never fail to receive some spiritual profit. So, whenever you meet with your class, if you go with the proper spirit, you will never fail to obtain some spiritual blessing. Beside, the reason why you hear many sermons without instruction, and often partake of the Lord's supper

without spiritual profit, and sing old familiar hymns without delight, and often pray without receiving any sensible answer, and read the Bible without edification, is because your ordinary spirit and practice are worldly, and you are in the daily neglect of private religious duties; so that when you engage in religious services in the church or elsewhere, you are not in a frame of mind to enjoy them. So in class meetings: you go thither unprepared to enjoy them, and no wonder you find them ordinarily uninteresting. Improve in religion at home, and in your intercourse with the world, and every time you go to class you will have something new to say, though you hear nothing new from others; you will find the class meeting invested with a new and growing interest; and no religious service will be so improving and delightful to you, however insipid and tedious it may be now. You will then discover that the old sayings, and hymns, and prayers, and counsels, of which you now complain, will appear in a new light; and that those who you think have been standing still for years have been advancing all the time, and are far ahead of you in spiritual knowledge and experience. Indeed, you will be pleased to adopt some of these same objectionable phrases to describe your own religious state; and you will find a real and profound delight, such as you never felt before, in uttering, "I feel more resolved than ever, by the grace of God, to make my calling and election sure;" and you will sing, with invigorating faith and undying pleasure:—

"Help me to watch and pray,
And on thyself rely;
Assured, if I my trust betray,
I shall forever die."

All this is just as you would have the class meeting to be, and all this shall be so, if you walk with Jesus daily: for

then you shall meet Jesus with his people in the class-room, whose presence is the primary requisite to happiness there.

We might fill a volume with excuses on this subject, but these will suffice, and we hasten to another part of this work.

PART V.

Duties of Preachers, Leaders, and Appeal to Private Members.

CHAPTER I.

DUTIES OF PREACHERS.

1. FROM the itinerant relation which the Methodist preacher sustains to the church, it is his duty, as far as practicable, to visit the classes composing his pastoral charge. He should take time for this, for this is of chief importance, and less material matters should never be permitted to interfere with the discharge of this duty. He should not be satisfied with the accounts given weekly by the leaders, though this, in many places, is greatly neglected or but little regarded. Beside, many of the leaders frequently are themselves unfaithful, and ignorant of the spiritual state of their classes, and so can give no information. Classes sometimes die on the hands of improper and unfaithful leaders, which might have been prevented by a prudent and timely change of leaders. But how can the evil be prevented, unless the preacher visit the classes and inform himself? Moreover, the preacher, by visiting the classes, and conversing with each member, can obtain a better knowledge of the spiritual condition of the class than he can from any account given by the leader. It is, in a word, only when the preacher's time is demanded

for the discharge of other duties that he is properly released from obligation to visit and examine the classes.

Mr. Wesley, the founder of the system, is, in this respect, an example for his successors in pastoral authority. Says he, "I rode to Bristol where, the following week, I spoke to each member of the society, and rejoiced over them, finding they had not been 'barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.'"^{*} Again: "On the following days I spoke with each member of the society in Kingswood. I cannot understand how any minister can hope ever to give up his account with joy, unless (as Ignatius advises) he 'knows all his flock by name; not overlooking the men-servants and maid-servants.'"[†] Again: "My brother and I began visiting the society together, which employed us from six in the morning every day till near six in the evening."[‡]

The neglect of this pastoral duty, and that of pastoral visitation, will certainly result not only in the loss of the spirituality, but decrease in the number, of those who habitually attend class. The services of the Sabbath day, however invigorating, are not enough to perpetuate, much less promote, the life of the church. Religion is social, and religion must be nourished in the class-room and the *homes* of men; and there the pastor must diffuse the charm and dispense the admonitions of the gospel he loves and preaches. "In the evening," says Mr. Wesley, "I reached Colchester. I found the society had decreased since L——C—— went away; and yet they had full as good preachers. But that is not sufficient: by repeated experiments we learn that though a man preach like an angel, he will neither collect, nor preserve a society which is collected, without visiting them from house to house."[§] Indeed,

* Works, vol. iii. p. 278. † Ibid. p. 279. ‡ Ibid. p. 279.

‡ Journal, vol. iv. p. 14.—Ibid. p. 380.

faithful pastoral visiting is of more importance than the most powerful preaching. The faithful pastor, though of ordinary abilities, is more efficient than the most popular and powerful preacher who confines his labors principally to the pulpit. Ordinarily, in the former case, more members will be added to the church, the church itself will be more spiritual in heart and life, and Christians will die happier than in the latter case. The influence of pastoral visitation upon the homes and classes will be reciprocal between the pastor and his flock. Religious sympathies will become intense, and mutual confidence be established. The pastor thus obtains a knowledge of the spiritual character and wants of his flock, which it is impossible for him otherwise to obtain. And without this knowledge, how little does his preaching avail! He may advance the general interests of Christianity, but little special spiritual good is effected. Happy pastor, who preaches with this knowledge! Happy flock, who have such a pastor! He visits the classes, and examines the members one by one; and this is his duty, and this he should do whenever it is practicable; and this he may do more conveniently and regularly on the stations than the circuits; and yet on neither station nor circuit should mere inconvenience prevent the discharge of this duty. It is laborious work, but it must be done. "I began visiting the classes," says Mr. Wesley, "in London, and that with more exactness than ever before. After going through them, I found the society contained about three-and-twenty hundred and fifty members, few of whom we could discern to be triflers, and none, we hope, live in wilful sin."* And this requires time, but it must be taken: "I spoke," says Mr. Wesley again, "one by one to the society at Hutton Rugby. They were about eighty in number: of whom near seventy were believers, and sixteen

* *Journal*, vol. iv. p. 52.

(probably) renewed in love.”* And it requires labor too: “I began,” says Mr. Wesley, “visiting the society (Kingswood) from house to house, taking them from west to east. This will undoubtedly be a heavy cross, no way pleasing to flesh and blood. But I already saw how unspeakably useful it will be to many souls.”† Again: “I began at the east end of the town (London) to visit the society from house to house. I know no branch of the pastoral office which is of greater importance than this. But it is so grievous to flesh and blood, that I can prevail on few, even of our preachers, to undertake it.”‡ Mr. Wesley is a capital example of faithfulness in discharging this duty. In a multitude of instances in his Journal, he speaks of his visiting the “classes” and the “societies.” In his *eightieth* year he says, “On *Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday*, I visited the classes; and on *Thursday*, and the following days, I visited the rest of the country societies.”§

It is as much the duty of Methodist ministers to see that the class meeting be observed by the people under their charge, as it is the duty of the people to observe them. Dulness, indolence, bashfulness, backwardness, a man-pleasing spirit, and the like, are no excuses for the neglect of our duty. No difficulties or hinderances that can be surmounted are excuses for neglect, and difficulties there will be so long as man has a corrupt heart. We do not say, that it is as much the duty of the minister to visit the the classes as it is to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments; but all duties should be so arranged that each may be discharged; they should not be permitted to clash, and none are to be neglected that *can* be performed.

2. It is the duty of the preacher to see that the leaders visit absentees faithfully and regularly. This is the solemn duty

* Journal, vol. iv. p. 103.

† Ibid. p. 384.

‡ Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 407.

§ Ibid. p. 567.

of the leaders. By neglecting this, a full class will speedily dwindle down and decline. Thus: a member may have been detained from class by necessity or by spiritual sloth. Next week his disposition to attend is sensibly lessened, and so on from week to week; and if he be not stirred up and encouraged by the affectionate admonitions of his leader, his negligence will increase, till, not being required to give an account of his religious state to his brethren, he will soon cease to examine himself, and his negligence will become confirmed, and eventually he loses all relish for, and abandons altogether, the communion of saints. If leaders will not visit absentees, they neglect a most important part of their work, and so prove themselves unworthy of the office they hold. Rather than souls should suffer from neglect, let the pastor remove such leaders, and substitute others of a better stamp. The pastor's work requires it.

3. Let the good old practice* of examining the class-books weekly, or whenever practicable, be universally revived and established, that the attendance of the members may be ascertained, the sick may be visited, the wavering be established, and the wandering reclaimed. For this take time; and then let the visitation be prompt and faithful. Thousands will be reclaimed; the melancholy work of backsliding will be arrested; and the churches increase and flourish as if in a perpetual revival. Every soul saved should, if possible, be made a permanent accession to the church, and an abiding and active agent in the work of God. Who, then, could estimate the rapidity of the progress, and the general efficiency of the church? In a few years the number and power of the church would be increased beyond all calculation. The very prospect is inspiring and makes the

* "Sunday, 20.—I spoke" says Mr. Wesley, "to every leader concerning every one under his care; and put out every person whom they could not recommend to me."—Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 427. This is genuine Wesleyan Methodist discipline.

heart leap for joy. Let the preachers be encouraged to go back for several years in some cases, and in company with their former leader visit them, and affectionately urge them to return.

4. Let there be occasionally a prudent interchange of leaders. This would enliven the classes, by a distribution of talents, and a varied fund of Christian experience. This will relieve and enliven the leaders, just as the itinerancy relieves and enlivens the preachers. This will bind the whole church together more closely in the bonds of Christian fellowship and unity. This will keep all the leaders at their post, and make them more diligent and desirous to be active and useful. Let the leaders that have visibly declined in zeal and godliness, and have fallen into a dull and monotonous way of leading their classes, and are not likely to revive; or by negligence have lost most of their numbers, and are not likely to recover them; be persuaded to resign their charge, or an assistant be appointed who *will* make up the lack of service.

5. Let the preachers more frequently and faithfully preach on the obligation of Christian communion, which is seldom insisted on from the pulpit, though the discipline of the visible church is one of the chief means of building up the spiritual church. Let the preacher point from the pulpit to the class-room with a solemn significance, and aid in rallying the classes around their leaders. Let him marshal his forces like a skilful general, and rouse and lead them forward as by a trumpet's call to battle, one blessed spirit inspiring every bosom, and order and courage prevailing in every rank. The onset of such a church will be omnipotent. "The preaching of Christ crucified is God's great ordinance;" and the voice of the preacher can be turned with greater effect nowhere than in urging the whole church in harmony and fellowship onward to the end and issues of Christian duty and service. The conquest of the world is the

certain and sublime achievement, and the richest celestial laurels shall be worn by the leaders and victors in the battle.

6. To administer discipline. As the ministers of Christ we should set ourselves to the execution of discipline in this most necessary part of our work. It is sad, indeed, that we should have settled down so long in the neglect of so important a duty. We hear from every quarter, "Our people are not ready for it; they will not bear it." Not that, but we dread the trouble and hatred it will involve. If our constitution is sound, the government must be supported; if what we demand is right, it is practicable; and if it is not practicable, why, the constitution should be altered. If attendance upon class be a proper test of membership, it should be enforced; if it be not, it should be annulled. If it be right to require it, why is it not enforced? if it be not, why do we require it? or trouble the church about its neglect? or complain so much of its neglect?

The use of discipline is remotely for the offender, and immediately for the church; but principally for the church, that others may be deterred from similar offences, and so the doctrine, order, and character of the church be manifested and kept pure. We all believe this, and nothing else is talked about and written about as more necessary than church-discipline, and nothing considered as more generally and lamentably neglected than it is. It has been so in all ages of the church. "It hath made me wonder sometimes," said Baxter, in 1655, "to look on the face of England, and see how few congregations in the land have any considerable execution of discipline, and to think withal what volumes have been written for it; and how almost all the ministry of the nation are engaged for it. How zealously they have contended for it, and made many a just exclamation against the opposers of it; and yet, notwithstanding all this, they will do little or nothing in the exercise of it. How many ministers are there in England that know not their own

charge, and cannot tell who are the members of it: that never cast out one obstinate sinner, nor brought one to public confession and promise of reformation, nor even admonished one publicly to call him to repentance!"*

Discipline should be executed, for there is no church-government without it.† It is good in itself, but what avails it if it effect no good? It matters not what the laws are, if they are not executed. The proper execution of wise laws is the best argument in their defence.

Discipline should be executed, since the neglect of it tends to induce offenders to believe that they are Christians when they are not, and to consider sin a tolerable thing, because it is tolerated by the church.

Discipline should be executed, that the difference between the church and the world may be manifest; otherwise the church will be corrupted and shorn of its majesty in the eyes of the world.

Discipline should be executed, because it is an ordinance of Christ; and it is as much the duty of ministers to execute it, as it is to preach, administer the sacraments, or perform any other function of their holy office.

Discipline should be executed, lest the church itself be ultimately destroyed by the neglect of it.

* *Reformed Pastor*, pp. 237, 238.

† "A church without discipline is like an army without a commander, which is a rabble during peace, and a prey to the enemy in time of war. It is like a family without a head, in which duty is left both undefined and unperformed; in which passion prevails, favoritism rules, envy rages, and the good of the whole is sacrificed to the caprice of one. It is like a garden without walls, which 'all who pass by do pluck'; which the 'wild boar of the forest doth waste,' and which the 'wild beast of the field doth devour.' In such a church there may be occasional flashes of power felt in the ordinances, granted by God in honor of individual devotedness; but, at the same time, there will always be a lamentable lack of harmony and holiness among the body of its ministers and members."—*Wesley's Magazine*, 1835, p. 594.

On these points we take our stand, and inquire, if these be the great reasons for the faithful execution of discipline, why, in all ages, has it been so much neglected by the church? Surely this is a most important inquiry, and we must call to our aid all the light we have on the subject. It is obvious there can be no valid reason against that which is supported by so many and such strong reasons. It is obvious, also, that the execution of discipline, supported and required as it is, is nevertheless a most difficult part of the minister's work, and it will be found that the difficulty lies in hinderances, and not in insurmountable obstacles. The hinderances usually mentioned, and which really exist, are the following:—

The vast trouble and labor a faithful execution of discipline would involve; the hate and malice it would excite in excommunicated members; the grief it would produce in their friends; the injury it might cause to weak members, inducing some to leave the church; the dissensions and contentions it might create in the church and in the neighborhood; the probability of doing no good to offenders after expulsion; the difficulty of bringing the guilty to trial, and of conducting the trial impartially and properly; the probability that, in most cases, it would do more harm to the church and the guilty than good; and the evils to be corrected are now so many, and have been of such long standing, that if they are not wholly insurmountable, the correction of them would involve the almost entire disorganization and dissolution of the church—that scarcely less than a revolution is required to restore the church to evangelical purity and simplicity. This is truly a startling array. It is enough to shake the soul of the boldest and wisest man. It is a work nothing short of omnipotence itself. But with omnipotence we must not quail. *The hinderances may be overcome.*

1. All these hinderances have been from the first, and

still are, in some places, as valid against the faithful preaching of the gospel. Do we assume, with the infidel, that the great objects of Christianity are to be frustrated by the difficulties to be overcome? that the world in rebellion is an overmatch for the Son of God? that the sedition and league of men and devils cannot be suppressed by the Spirit of God? Christ never acknowledged it; his apostles never believed it. He came not to send peace on earth, and reminded his apostles that the world would hate them; and they faithfully discharged their duty at the cost of their lives, every one of them, save John, and he at the cost of exile; and with what success they discharged their duty, nearly twenty centuries can attest. And what are the difficulties before us, compared with those they surmounted? and what is the cost required of us, compared with what was exacted of them? Did Luther quail before the portentous array of papal corruptions, superstitions, and opposition? No; but emancipated Europe, gave the nations a progressive freedom, and agitated Rome with convulsions from which she has never recovered, and can never recover. And what of Wesley? Read his Journal. No worldly hazard, nor human obstacle, nor possible suffering, was a reason against his work. With invincible courage, unruffled serenity, and iron firmness, he grappled, almost single-handed, with difficulties but little inferior to those encountered by Paul and Luther, and laid the foundations of Methodism in sound doctrine, profound experience, a simple worship, and a wholesome discipline. To the end of his long life he administered a mild and firm discipline, which he regarded as indispensable to the permanence and prosperity of the "United Societies;" and were he presiding over us now, in one short year the whole land would be covered with useless branches thrown out of the church, unless they could be revived with original greenness, and adorned with original fruitfulness. Every page of his new

Journal would contain his old familiar phrase, "I commenced visiting the classes," &c. The church, in its vast family of circuits and stations, would be thrown into a temporary consternation. Revivals would then flame out in every direction. A shout would go up from the whole land. Methodism, with strength renewed, in unrivalled beauty, symmetry, majesty, and power, would go forth, and diffuse the balm and the bloom of immortality abroad this wilderness world with a thousand-fold more rapidity than she is now doing.* And shall we decline the noble work, or cowardly shrink from the difficulty before us? The God of Paul and Luther and Wesley "is with us." And, let it be carefully observed, that, as a branch of the ministry of Christ, we are responsible for the faithful spiritual care and oversight of that prominent part in the world's redemption in which, in the allotments of providence, we have been placed, for the advancement of the great work

* "What would Methodism have been without its vigorous system of discipline? No one can read our early records, without perceiving the value Mr. Wesley and the first preachers set upon this only means of purifying and invigorating a Christian church. It is no proof that discipline is now less required, or ought now to be relaxed, that it is so clamorously resisted. There will always be those who object to be its subjects, and others to be its administrators. Some, in their anxiety about numerical strength, are, perhaps, in danger of undervaluing religious purity. Some have a natural timidity, and will not endure the trouble. Some have not prospective views of the tendencies of evil, and do not, therefore, anticipate the results of its full development. And, perhaps, some are tempted to act on the eventually costly principle of a miserable expediency, instead of walking by rule; and trust to the providence or grace of God to prevent, or overrule, or mitigate those consequences which they cannot but expect will sooner or later result. There are societies which have suffered the excisions of the pruning-knife, and whose present healthy, thriving, vigorous, and aggressive character, and hearty engagement in every department of Methodism, may satisfy us that a temporary inconvenience may be the seed of a lasting blessing."—Wesleyan Magazine, 1835. Art. "Wesleyan Methodism and the Spirit of the Age," p. 619.

transmitted to us by our fathers—for the farther progress of the sublime work of ages.

2. Wherever the ministry of Christ have been timid and temporizing, Christianity has obtained but a partial success; and whenever and wherever a wholesome discipline has been neglected, the purest churches have degenerated into formality and corruption. This is the history of the church in all ages. Not an exception can be found. If every other duty of the ministry be faithfully performed, and the execution of discipline be neglected, though then there would be the least occasion for its execution, evil upon evil, and abuse upon abuse, will accumulate, till a promiscuous mass of corruption is formed, that will preponderate over the little good that remains in the church. We do not assume that corruption has yet become manifest, or even exists, in our church; but we do assume that, because the execution of discipline has been neglected so long, and to so great an extent, and in very many particulars, formality is spreading alarmingly in every direction; and yet we affirm as our decided conviction, that the power of godliness in the aggregate prevails over the amount of lifeless formality. And the time has come when we can temporize and be timid no longer in preaching and in the execution of discipline, *without endangering the essential purity and general safety of the church*. The institutions of our church were ordained to do good; and to permit them to be neglected with impunity is not only to frustrate the good designed, but to throw wide open the door for the admission of every form of evil and corruption. If the execution of discipline will effect good, God will bless it to do good, and we are under the profoundest responsibility to execute it. Discipline is *the last means* to protect the church, and it is to be executed when every antecedent means has failed. Those within and those without the church will be benefited by it, if offenders are not; and hence it is vain to

say we preclude all opportunity to do offenders any good by expelling them from the church.

3. The hinderances in the way to the execution of discipline are great, it is true, but not so great as we are apt to imagine. A prudent and wise method of procedure will obviate many, if not all, of them. Often where we have apprehended the most serious consequences, the least harm has ensued. Instead of malice and hate, the excommunicated have manifested submission and contrition. The friends of offenders, it is true, have been grieved, and it could not be otherwise; but their grief was neither a crime nor an evil. Weak members may have left the church, and such never had a strong attachment for the church; but others were admonished to be more diligent and faithful, lest they also share the same fate. Dissensions and contentions may have arisen, but they soon subsided, and order and quiet were restored to the church and the neighborhood. Good to offenders is not the chief object of church discipline, though, in most cases, this is the surest means of doing them good.* The difficulty of

* The tendency of discipline is to humble the offender, to turn his mind directly upon his sin, and awaken the most serious reflections respecting that melancholy day when the Judge shall pronounce against him the stern and irrevocable sentence of condemnation and death.

“Nothing in the order of means is equally adapted to awaken compunction in the guilty with spiritual censures impartially administered. The sentence of excommunication, in particular, harmonizing with the dictates of conscience, and re-echoed by her voice, is truly terrible: it is the voice of God speaking through its legitimate organ, which he who despises or neglects, ranks with ‘heathen men,’ joins the synagogue of Satan, and takes his lot with an unbelieving world, doomed to perdition. Excommunication is a sword which, strong in its apparent weakness, and the sharper and more keenly-edged for being divested of all sensible and exterior envelopments, lights immediately on the spirit, and inflicts a wound which no balm can cure, no ointment can mollify, but which must continue to ulcerate and burn, till healed by the blood of the atonement, applied by penitence and prayer.”—Treatise on Terms of Communion, by Robert Hall, p. 138.

bringing the guilty to trial, and of conducting the trial impartially and properly, is admitted; but it is not insurmountable, as experience has attested, and will attest: promptness, firmness, energy, and prudence are all that are required, and the pastor that has not these is not qualified to have the government of the church; and then the argument will turn upon the incapability of the pastor to govern, and not upon the evil of church discipline. But as ability to govern the church is as necessary a qualification as ability to preach, he that is unable to rule the church should not be intrusted with the work of governing, any more than with authority to preach—indeed, not as much; for he may be intrusted with authority to preach, and so accomplish some good, and the authority to govern be given to another. And so a negligent pastor, though able to govern, should not be intrusted with an authority which he will not exercise. And as to the probability that, in most cases, the execution of discipline would do more harm to the church and the guilty than good, the probability is all the other way; in most cases it will be beneficial to the guilty, if any thing can be, since this is the last means to benefit him that can be applied; and as lopping off the withered branches makes a tree the more fruitful, or as removing those affected with a contagious disease is a protection to those in good health, so the execution of discipline tends to improve the efficiency of the church and preserve its purity. But as to the difficulty and the danger of removing the many evils of *long standing* in the church, that is the most serious thing for our attention, and to it we shall give a most careful consideration.

In the first place, as respects class meetings, the neglect of them has become so general, and has been tolerated so long, that the institution is talked of as *obsolete*, if not regarded by many as such. It would not therefore be wise and safe to proceed to the execution of discipline *abruptly*.

The pastor should forewarn duly his flock of his resolution to revive and enforce the discipline on the subject of class meetings, and then proceed, with the help of the leaders, to the faithful discharge of the duties prescribed as *preliminary* to the arrangement and trial of those who "continue to neglect," and "and will not amend." In a vast majority of cases, with the proper treatment, amendment will ensue. Secondly, the pastor and leaders must be prompt, firm, mild, active, and impartial. It will avail but little, it will do more harm than good, to threaten, and say what you are going to do, and then do nothing, or to do what you do partially. Thirdly, the pastor and leaders must act in concert. Fourthly, the pastors themselves should all act in concert. It would be a sad thing for a negligent pastor to pull down one year what another had built up. And we will venture, fifthly, to suggest that the faithful execution of discipline, especially in the case of the neglect of class meetings, be made by the General Conference as specifically, strictly, and indispensably *conditional* of continuance in authority to govern the church, as the faithful discharge of the duty of preaching is now conditional of continuance in authority to preach. Incapacity, likewise, should be regarded as good a ground of deposition in the one case as in the other.

Let not those who lead the way in restoring the proper discipline in our church be charged as innovators, but regarded as doing their duty, and as correcting what is indeed a practical innovation. And should not every minister feel encouraged in the possession of such a means for the effectual management of his work, and his heart bound for joy when he looks forward, and sees what, with the blessing of God, it will accomplish?

Who should be the first to lead in this most desirable reformation? Evidently those who are the most pious, able, and influential in the ministry, because their very piety, ability, and influence have abated the sense of obligation in

private members to attend class meetings, and encouraged them to neglect that which is not considered, after all, as a matter of so much offence. If the chief rulers hold obedience to the laws as a matter of little importance, it will not be surprising if the private citizens consider their violation as a matter of little disgrace. If superior men allow the neglect of class meetings, inferior men will be borne down by the impetuous tide. The practice of superior men is apt to be made by the people the standard of their duty to the ministry, as well as the standard of the minister's work; and if this work be made to comprehend no more than preaching the word, administering the sacraments, and visiting the sick, the people will soon come to expect no more at their hands; and then it will be next to impossible for inferior men to execute discipline, which is as essential a part of the minister's work as the above duties.

Administration of discipline requires great wisdom and firmness. We have already considered attendance upon class meeting as a condition of membership. Yet the administration of discipline, in cases of wilful and repeated neglect, is often a matter of very great delicacy. "I met," says Mr. Wesley, "the society (in Norwich) at five, and explained the nature and use of meeting in a class. Upon inquiry, I found, we have now about five hundred members. But a hundred and fifty of these do not *pretend* to meet at all. *Of those, therefore, I made no account.* They hang on but a single thread."* And yet they were permitted to continue in the society, though they were not included in the account of the number of those in society. In matters of this kind the preacher must exercise his best judgment.

If the proper discipline, when required, be neglected, spiritual life must soon almost altogether expire. Says Mr.

* Journal, vol. iv. p. 44.

Wesley : “ I reached Launcestown, and found the small remains of a dead, scattered society : and no wonder, as they have had scarce any discipline, and only one sermon in a fortnight. On *Friday*, 5th, I found just such another society at Camelford. But their deadness here was owing to bitterness against each other. In the morning I heard the contending parties face to face ; and they resolved and promised, on all sides, to let past things be forgotten. Oh, how few have learned to forgive one another, as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven us ! ”* In the one case, the remedy, discipline, was not applied ; in the other case, the simple remedy is applied, and the society reconciled. When, however, it is evident that any have lost all spiritual life ; that no consideration is given to the means of grace ; that no regard is entertained for the class meeting ; that no good is derived by continuing longer in the class or in the church ; that they do not “ hang on even by a single thread,”—it is a plain case that the proper steps should be immediately and promptly taken to remove all such from association with the church. “ I retired,” says Mr. Wesley, “ to Lewisham, and transcribed the list of the society. About a hundred and sixty I left out, to whom I can do no good at present.”† Again : “ I met the classes, (at York,) and found many therein who were much alive to God, but many others who were utterly dead ; which sufficiently accounts for the society’s not increasing.”‡ These, as useless branches, should be lopped off from the parent tree, unless they can be revived.

Sometimes Mr. Wesley employed several days consecutively in visiting the classes, and even from most flourishing societies often excluded large numbers. “ I began,” says he, “ visiting the classes, (Dublin,) which employed me (from Friday) to the Thursday following. We found it necessary

* *Journal*, vol. iv. p. 71.

† *Wesley’s Works*, vol. iv. p. 91.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

to exclude one hundred and twelve members; there remained eleven hundred and thirty-six.”* This work must have required much patience and labor, as well as great prudence and firmness. Doubtless the classes were all visited and examined, and the leaders also strictly examined respecting every individual member of their classes, before Mr. Wesley found just and sufficient reasons for excluding so large a number from the society or church in Dublin. Preachers in charge of circuits or stations should pursue the same course wherever it is required, in the present day. And they should continue to do this, from year to year, with all prudence and firmness, till the unholy leaven is removed from the church. The year following, Mr. Wesley again visited Dublin, and he makes this entry in his Journal: “On *Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday*, I visited the classes, now containing a little above a thousand members, after I had excluded about a hundred.”† Again: “I came to Nottingham. I had long doubted what it was that hindered the work of God here. But upon inquiry, the case was plain. So many of the society were either triflers or disorderly walkers, that the blessing of God could not rest upon them; so I made short work, cutting off all such at a stroke, and leaving only that little handful who (as far as could be judged) were really in earnest to save their souls.”‡ And by this method he actually strengthened the church.

Faithful administration of the discipline, we have said, is required in order to protect the purity and vindicate the reputation of the church. It is so under civil and all other kinds of good government. No man more than Mr. Wesley felt the force of this requisition; no man more wisely and firmly than he administered government upon this principle. “God humbled us,” says he, “in the evening by the loss of

* Wesley’s Works, vol. iv. p. 670.

† Ibid. p. 725.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 366.

more than thirty of our little company, whom I was obliged to exclude, as no longer adorning the gospel of Christ. I believed it best openly to declare both their names and the reasons why they were excluded. We then all cried unto God, that this might be for their edification, and not for destruction.”* Again: “After diligent inquiry made, I removed all those from the congregation of the faithful (in London) whose behaviour or spirit was not agreeable to the gospel of Christ: openly declaring the objections I had to each, that others might fear, and cry to God for them.”† And so he often cut off many at a time from a single society: “In the following week I diligently inquired who they were that did not walk according to the gospel. In consequence of which I was obliged to put away above fifty persons. There remained above eight hundred in the society.”‡ In another case he mentions the expulsion of sixty-four, and the causes for which they were expelled: “The number of those who were expelled the society was sixty-four: two for cursing and swearing; two for habitual Sabbath-breaking; seventeen for drunkenness; two for retailing spirituous liquors; three for quarrelling and brawling; one for beating his wife; three for habitual, wilful lying; four for railing and evil-speaking; one for idleness and laziness; and nine-and-twenty for lightness and carelessness.”§ This work of expulsion he continued: “The next week, we endeavored to purge the society (London) of all that did not walk according to the gospel. By this means we reduced the number of members to less than nineteen hundred. But number is an inconsiderable circumstance. May God increase them in faith and love!”|| Thus, of the society at Gateshead he says: “The society, which the first year consisted of above eight hundred members, is now reduced to four hundred.

* Wesley’s Works, vol. iii. p. 236.

† Ibid. p. 237.

‡ Ibid. p. 280.

§ Ibid. p. 258.

|| Ibid. p. 317.

But, according to the old proverb, the half is more than the whole. We shall not be ashamed of any of these, when we speak of our enemies in the gate.”*

The great importance Mr. Wesley attached to discipline may be seen from the following quotations :

“Q. 55. How can we account for the decrease of the work of God in some circuits, both this year and the last ?

A. It may be owing either, (1.) To the want of zeal and exactness in the assistant, occasioning want of discipline throughout, &c.

Q. 56. What can be done in order to revive the work of God where it is decayed ?

A. (2.) Let both assistants and preachers be conscientiously exact in the whole Methodist discipline.”†

To Rev. Christopher Hopper, one of his preachers, he wrote : “London, October 13, 1770 :—My dear brother : You are quite right. If a man preach like an angel, he will do little good without exact discipline.”‡

To Mr. (afterward Dr.) Adam Clarke, he wrote : “New London, January 3, 1787 :—Dear Adam : You see, none that trust in Him are confounded. When God is for us, who can be against us ? Discipline is the great want in Guernsey ; without which the work of God cannot prosper. You did well to set upon it without delay, and to be as exact as possible. It is a true saying, ‘The soul and the body make the man ; and the spirit and the discipline make a Christian.’”§ And in his Journal he writes, “Friday 17, (1750,) I preached at Ludgvan at noon, and at Newlyn in the evening. Through all Cornwall, I find the societies have suffered great loss from want of discipline. Wisely said the

* Wesley’s Works, vol. iii. p. 392.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 232.—Minutes of several conversations between Mr. Wesley and others.

‡ Ibid. vol. vi. p. 759

§ Ibid. vol. vii. p. 203.

ancients, 'The soul and body make a man ; the Spirit and discipline make a Christian.' ”*

A friend asked Mr. Wesley, near the close of his long and useful life, "What can be done for Methodism when you are gone?" He replied, "They must take heed to their doctrine, their experience, their practice, and their discipline. If they attend to their doctrine only, they will make Antinomians of the people ; if they attend to their experience only, they will become enthusiasts ; if they attend to their practice only, they will become Pharisees ; and if they attend strictly to their doctrine, their experience, and their practice, and neglect their discipline, they will act like a man who plants a vineyard, and leaves it without a fence, to be trodden down by the wild animals of the forest."

The question of exclusion for wilful and repeated neglect of class is of the gravest nature, and demands at all times a most careful consideration. It involves the rights and interests both of the church and the delinquent members. No rights and interests of man can be as great as those of church-membership, and no interests of the church can be as great as those of purity and integrity ; and her authority to protect these must be vindicated. The rule for exclusion for non-attendance of class is, therefore, so prescribed, as to guard against improper and injudicious proceeding with offenders, and at the same time protect the purity, integrity, and authority of the church.

Let it be observed that the term employed is exclusion, and not expulsion, though the result in both cases is the same ; namely, a forfeiture of the rights and privileges of church-membership. The rule to be observed in excluding for offence is most proper and judicious ; and when properly and judiciously applied, no one has any just ground for complaint. The offence is "wilful and repeated neglect." The

* Wesley's Works, vol. iii. p. 497.

steps to be observed are the following: First, it is the duty of the leader to visit offenders of this nature, "to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require," and "inform the minister of any that will not be reproved."* When neglect has been repeated, and the leader is satisfied that it is wilful, it is his duty to inform the minister of any and every such case. It is then, secondly, the duty of the pastor to visit the offender, "whenever it is practicable," and "explain to him the consequence of continued neglect, *viz.* exclusion." Thirdly, if he do "not amend," his case is to be brought "before the society, or a select number, before whom he shall have been cited to appear; and if found guilty of wilful neglect, by the decision of the majority of the members, he is to be laid aside." And, fourthly, the preacher is to "show that he is excluded for a breach of our rules, and not for immoral conduct." After the leader has visited and used his best efforts to reclaim the offender, but in vain,—after the pastor has done the same, but in vain,—after both have exercised the proper forbearance, but in vain,—what then is the conclusion to which the pastor must come? Why, that the offender has in fact withdrawn himself from the pastoral oversight of the Methodist ministry, and therefore that he should be formally excluded from the Methodist Church, and so his case is brought before the church, as above, that this may be done. He had before in fact voluntarily withdrawn himself from the church, and by the decision of the church, as above, the preacher is to state that he is excluded, "laid aside," is no longer a member of the Methodist Church, no longer under the pastoral oversight of the Methodist ministry. It is immaterial to say that he may nevertheless be a Christian. By his wilful and repeated neglect to meet his class, he puts it out of the power of his leader and his pastor to determine whether he

* Discipline, (1854)—General Rules—Class Leaders' duties, p. 29.

is a Christian or not; and so, if he be permitted to remain longer in association with the church, he is responsible to none, and none can extend the proper spiritual care to him. When the leader and the pastor have done all they can to induce him to submit to their spiritual care, but in vain, are they to be held responsible any longer for his oversight? Certainly not. And what else can be done in his case, but to lay him aside? to exclude him from the church? Not for "immorality," but because he has actually withdrawn himself from the spiritual care of the Methodist Church; and surely he has no just ground of complaint against the church for formally doing what he has actually, "wilfully," and "repeatedly" done himself. He voluntarily obligated himself to attend class when he joined the church on probation, and the rule required that he should attend class at least six months before he should be received into full membership; and the violation of this rule, which would have been just ground to prevent his reception into full membership, is still just ground for his exclusion. And so he must be laid aside for the very reason for which he would not have been received. In a word, wilful and repeated neglect of class is a satisfactory evidence of a backslidden state, for which the church has no other remedy but exclusion.

As the object of the laws of the church is to maintain and preserve the church for the good of man and the service of God, the penal sanctions of the laws must be answerable to this object; and therefore the violation of them must involve the loss of the privileges and benefits which the church enjoys. Expulsion, then, is not only necessary to vindicate the laws of the church, but is the greatest penalty the church can inflict.

We will close this chapter with two quotations: "The one great cause of the great flourishing of religion in the primitive times, was certainly the strictness used by them in their admission of members into church societies, which

is fully described by *Origen* against *Celsus*, who tells us they did "inquire into their lives and carriages, to discern their seriousness in the profession of Christianity during their being catechumens."* "To make evident this good of organized religion, you need but contrast the piety of a church so lax that its judicial function is steadily neglected, with that of one so inflexible as that it is steadily performed. The melancholy difference will show the meaning of the church, at least, as a judicial body."†

* Stilling. Iren. p. 161. † Miller's Design of the Church, p. 100.

CHAPTER II.

HOW TO PROMOTE PROSPERITY IN THE CLASSES.

WE shall devote a brief chapter to a consideration of other duties of the preachers, by the discharge of which prosperity may be greatly promoted in the classes.

1. Zeal must be promoted. "I examined the society at Limerick, containing now a hundred and one persons, seven less than they were two years ago. I little wonder at this, considering the scandal of the cross is well-nigh ceased here, through the wise and steady behavior of our brethren. But they want zeal; they are not fervent in spirit; therefore, they cannot increase."*

2. Offenders should be removed, or in a short time, the church will decrease in number and in grace. "On *Monday* and *Tuesday*," says Mr. Wesley, "I revised the classes, (at Dublin.) The number of the members in the society is shrunk from upward of five hundred to beneath four hundred, in two years; but I trust they will now increase, as the offences are removed, and brotherly love restored."†

3. Regularity must be observed, or the means of grace will be abandoned, and the church scattered. "In the evening I returned to Norwich. Never was a poor society so neglected, as this has been for the past year. The morning preaching was at an end; the bands suffered all to fall in pieces; and no care at all taken of the classes, so that whether they met or not, it was all one; going to church and sacrament were forgotten; and the people rambled

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 433.

† Ibid. p. 356.

hither and thither as they listed. On *Friday* evening I met the society, and told them, plain, I was resolved to have a regular society or none. I then read the rules, and desired every one to consider whether he was willing to walk by these rules or no. Those in particular, of meeting their class every week, unless hindered by distance or sickness, (the only reasons for not meeting which I could allow,) and being constant at church and sacrament. I desired those who were so minded to meet me the next night, and the rest to stay away. The next night we had far the greater part; on whom I strongly enforced the same thing. *Sunday*, 20th.—I spoke to every leader concerning every one under his care; and put out every person whom they could not recommend to me. After this was done, out of two hundred and four members, one hundred and twenty-four remained. And these points shall be carried, if only fifty remain in the society.”*

4. The experimental doctrines of the gospel must be preached and enforced. “I examined the society at Edinburgh. In five years, I found, five members had been gained! Ninety-nine being increased to a hundred and four. What then have our preachers been doing all this time? 1. They have preached four evenings in the week, and on Sunday morning; the other mornings they have fairly given up. 2. They have taken great care not to speak too plain, lest they should give offence. 3. When Mr. Brackenbury preached the old Methodist doctrine, one of them said, “You must not preach such doctrine here. The doctrine of perfection is not calculated for the meridian of Edinburgh.” Waiving then all other hinderances, is it any wonder that the work of God has not prospered here?”† And so the witness of the Spirit, direct and indirect, and other inconceivably important experimental doctrines, as also many

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 427.

† Ibid. p. 510.

practical duties, as simplicity in dress, self-denial, religious conversation, meekness, patience, resignation, humility, brotherly-kindness, godliness, temperance, zeal, should be taught and enforced from the pulpit and in the class-room.

5. The practical doctrines of the gospel must be taught and enforced. "I went on to Bolton. The society here are true, original Methodists. They are not conformed to the world, either in its maxims, its spirit, or its fashions; but are simple followers of the Lamb: consequently they increase both in grace and number."*

6. Union must be preserved. "I preached at Paulton, where the people are still alive, and the society is still as one family; consequently it increases both in grace and number."†

7. By encouraging activity, importunate prayer, and incessant watchfulness. "I made an exact inquiry into the state of the society, (Cork.) I found the number was about four hundred, many of whom were greatly in earnest. Many children, chiefly girls, were indisputably justified; some of them were likewise sanctified, and were patterns of all holiness. But how shall we keep up the flame that is now kindled, not only in Cork, but in many parts of the nation? Not by sitting still; but by stirring up the gift of God that is in them; by uninterrupted watchfulness; by warning every one, and exhorting every one; by besieging the throne with all the powers of prayer; and, after all, some *will*, and some *will not*, improve the grace which they have received. Therefore there must be a falling away. We are not to be discouraged at this; but to do all that in us lies to-day, leaving the morrow to God."‡

8. By encouraging patience, forbearance, meekness, and gentleness toward one another. "Finding a remarkable deadness, (in the society at Limerick,) I inquired what were

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. p. 540. † Ibid. p. 517. ‡ Ibid. p. 614.

the reasons of it; and found: 1. There had been, for several months, a deep misunderstanding between the preachers and the chief of the society. Hence, on the one hand, the preachers had little life or spirit to preach; and, on the other, the congregation dwindled away. 2. Many left off meeting their bands, and many others seldom met their classes. 3. Prayer-meetings were entirely given up. What wonder if all the people were as dead as stones! After morning service I met the stewards and leaders, and inquired into the rise of the late misunderstanding. I found the matter itself was nothing; but want of patience on both sides had swelled the mole-hill into a mountain. Oh how patient, how meek, how gentle toward all men ought a preacher, especially a Methodist, to be!"*

9. By encouraging the cultivation of all the Christian graces. Not one, or many, to the comparative neglect of the rest. If a single Christian temper, disposition, or grace be neglected, the soul will fail to make any sensible progress. And hence it is sometimes a matter of surprise to the pastor that his flock, in most things exemplary and consistent, enjoy so little of the life and power of godliness, and increase so slowly in number and grace. The explanation is often found in some general neglect of some *particular grace*. "This week," says Mr. Wesley, "I visited the classes in Bristol. I wonder we do not increase in number, although many are convinced, many justified, and a few perfected in love. I can impute the want of increase to nothing but the want of *self-denial*. Without this, indeed, whatever helps they have, no believers can go forward."†

10. By reproving covetousness, and its invariable concomitants, formality and lukewarmness. No passion of human nature, except bigotry, contracts the heart more than covetousness, or more effectually represses the generous im-

* Wesley's Works, vol. iv. pp. 662, 663.

† Ibid. p. 737

pulses of vital godliness. And for this we have proof from Mr. Wesley: "I preached once more at Portarlington, and afterward reproved this society likewise, for the miserable covetousness of some, and lukewarmness of others. It may be they will be zealous, and repent, and do the first works."*

These are all truly evangelical duties which were so faithfully discharged by Mr. Wesley, and not another word of comment is required.

11. And here it is important to consider what should be the size of the classes. No class, if possible, *should be larger than the leader is capable of overseeing.*

God does not require natural or moral impossibilities. The leader must be able to give attention to *all* his class. Hence he must know every one in his class, not only personally, but the infirmities, inclination, and conversation of each, the sins to which each is most inclined, the duties which each is most apt to neglect, the temptations to which each is most liable, and the trials to which each is most exposed. Baxter says to the preacher, "Doth not a careful shepherd look after every individual sheep; and a good teacher after every individual scholar; and a good physician after every particular patient; and a good commander after every individual soldier? Why, then, should not the shepherds, the teachers, the physicians, the guides of the churches of Christ, take heed to every individual member of their charge?" And should not the leader be able carefully and properly to look after every member of his class? The shepherd, in the parable, missed a single sheep, and he left "the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness," to seek after it. Paul taught "from house to house;" and he "warned *every* man, and taught *every* man, that he might present *every* man perfect in Christ Jesus." Such was the practice of the primitive Christians. Says Ignatius, "Let assem-

* Wesley's Works, vol. iii. p. 493.

blies be often gathered; inquire after *all by name*; despise not servant-men or maids."

When to all this we add that it is the leader's duty to visit the sick, look after the delinquent, report the disorderly, and attend strictly to the weekly collections, it is evident the number of his class should be proportioned to the time he has to spare for these duties; for leaders ordinarily require most of their time to look after their own private and secular affairs. The plan of enormous classes is, therefore, a very unwise, if not a destructive, policy. It ought not to be submitted to, except as a matter of extreme necessity, and even then the design of the class meeting cannot be fully accomplished, because the leader is overburdened. Far better were it, in such cases, to constitute female leaders; and many experienced sisters can be found who can extend spiritual care to a small class, and transact all the business of the office, as well as any of the brethren. Diminish the size of the classes, and many leaders can be found who will answer well, who now decline the charge of the larger classes.

We hesitate not a moment to suggest the adoption—*everywhere* it is possible to do it—of the disciplinary plan of "*about twelve persons in a class.*"* This was done in early Methodism, when, of course, the number of persons proper as leaders was much smaller comparatively than it is now. Let the churches everywhere and immediately be regulated strictly upon this principle, and continue to be so regulated in future, and, in a short time, the most enlarged success will follow. A most gratifying change in a few weeks will be obvious. The whole church will wake up as from sleep, and unbounded prosperity, in spiritual and temporal affairs, will be enjoyed throughout the length and breadth of our church. It is *impossible* for the church to flourish to much extent, in either of these respects, upon the plan of enormously large classes.

We will dwell a moment longer on this most important branch of the preacher's duties, because herein lies a most wholesome remedy to most of the evils at present embarrassing the progress and impeding the prosperity of the Methodist Church. The mammoth size of the classes will inevitably break down the institution of classes in any place : the leader *cannot* attend to the solemn and important duties of his office in any such case, and the greater portion of the class, consequently, must be without spiritual care, and so fall away, and the rest ordinarily, with few exceptions, be discouraged. For example : the class is composed of thirty or forty members, ten of whom ordinarily attend class ; though this, in some places, is a large concession ; how can the leader, ordinarily dependent upon his daily labor for support, attend to his daily labors, and visit in a single week twenty or thirty absentees ? It is impossible. But say the class is composed of twelve members, and eight or ten are ordinarily present ; it is now an easy matter for the leader to spare time during the week to visit the few absentees. Beside, in the large classes, one disposed to neglect, will easily imagine that he will not be missed in the crowd—enough will attend without him ; but in the smaller classes no one can fall upon this fallacious expedient. Moreover, in the large classes, should an unusually large number at any time attend, the leader has not time in the brief service to attend to the spiritual state of each one present, and so the occasion is not only tedious in itself, but comparatively profitless. Further, in the large classes it is impossible for the leader to attend to the financial affairs of the church ; in the small classes it is easily and pleasantly done. Once more : the reduction of the size of the classes, and a corresponding enlargement of the number of the classes, will bring out from the body of the church a larger number of useful and active men who, as leaders, will share in the labors of governing the church, and thus make the labor of the pastor and of

each official member easy, delightful, and profitable. Suddenly the pastor finds himself surrounded by forty or fifty counsellors and helpers, each supporting the other, and all supporting the pastor,—no one having more on his hands and heart than he can do ; each understanding his whole duty—and the performance of his whole duty being easy ; and the pastor at a glance surveying his whole charge *as it is*. Forty or fifty men, or more, if required in a large charge, engaged in the noble and holy work of regulating the church, and leading souls to glory ; oh, it is animating ! Twenty men in the same charge, burdened, oppressed, and exhausted with the cares, and labors, and responsibilities of church-government, spiritual and financial ; oh, it is discouraging, it is crushing, to the boldest pastor and the best official body in the land ! Again : fifty classes as the nurseries of revival, revivals would break out in every part of the ample bounds of Methodism ! Once more : enlarge the number of the classes, and as the class-rooms are the principal nurseries of the Methodist ministry, a proportionable number of preachers would come forth annually from these sacred schools and holy retirements, to supply the utmost wants of the church ; and then—not as now we feel everywhere—would there be felt anywhere the want of “ laborers in the vineyard.” You may say, there are difficulties to all this ; we answer, they are imaginary, they are nothing. God help us ! In a neighboring charge, the change we suggest has been recently made, and the whole church seems to have been suddenly revived as from the dead. God help us !

CHAPTER III.

THE NATURE AND DUTIES OF THE OFFICE OF LEADERS.

1. THE institution of the office of class-leaders may be defended from the apostolic practice. We have already shown that no definite and invariable form of church-government is prescribed in the New Testament, and, consequently, it is probable that the apostles did not observe a fixed and invariable course of settling the external and circumstantial government of the churches they planted, but adopted a mode or form of government according to circumstances of places and persons. We are not to conclude that the form of government which they observed in *some* places was their *general* or *universal* practice, for this would be a universal conclusion from particular premises. The different state, condition, and number in the apostolic churches, and in the churches founded after the apostolic times, required not only different rites and customs, but *a multitude of new and corresponding offices and officers*. All the apostles had not equal success in all places, and, consequently, a small church did not require the same number of officers to govern it as the larger churches did. Peter himself did not always preach with the same success which attended his *first* sermon. Paul had but few converts in Athens. In smaller churches, a smaller number of officers might discharge the work of spiritual care than was required in larger churches. “The duty of officers lying in reference to the people, where the people were but few, one constant, settled officer, with deacons under him, might, with as much ease, discharge the work, as, in a numerous

church, the joint help of many officers was necessary to carry on."* The same author: "They have either a very low opinion of the work of a gospel bishop, or very little consideration of the zeal, activity, and diligence which was then used in preaching, reproofing, exhorting, in season, out of season, that think one single person was able to undergo it all. Discipline was a great deal more strict then, preaching more diligent, men more apprehensive of the weight of their function, than for any to undertake such a care and charge of souls that it was impossible for them ever to know, observe, or watch over, so as to give an account for them. Beside, while we suppose this one person employed in the duties of his flock, what leisure or time could such a one have to preach to the Gentiles and unbelieving Jews in order to their conversion."† Stillingfleet here hits exactly upon the organization of our itinerant ministry, and the class-leaders as helpers. The apostles laid out their work for subjecting the world to the obedience of faith; and, while they advanced in their itinerant labors among Jews and Gentiles, they left the churches thus planted under such officers as necessity required. They must have done this, or confined their labors and lives to settled and particular churches. So with the Methodist ministry exactly: in order that they may "go into" as much of "the world" as possible, "and preach the gospel to" as many as possible; and that they may depart from place to place, though for a short time, they must leave the class-leaders to look after and watch over the fruits of their labors: otherwise they must abridge their labors, abrogate the itinerant plan, and settle where churches are established, or where a new church may be planted: the alternative is between the office of the class-leaders and the abandonment of the itinerancy. The world is to be converted by the

* Stillingfleet's Irenicum, p. 349.

† Ibid. p. 356.

preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, and it is easy to see with what rapidity, by the aid of the leaders, the Methodist ministry have advanced in the work of preaching — passing consecutively from revival to revival around their circuits, and leaving the fruits of revival under the spiritual care of the leaders. The principal work of Paul was “to preach the gospel;” and so of the other apostles; and so of the ministry of Christ in all ages, especially an itinerant ministry; and where time over and above for this work is insufficient for the full discharge of pastoral duties, the necessity of helpers in the work is obvious.

From the *nature and burden* of a settled ministry in other churches, the necessity of helpers, like the class-leaders, has been felt and acknowledged. “It is a lamentable impediment to the reformation of the church and the saving of souls, that, in most popular towns, there are but one or two men to oversee many thousand souls, and so there are not laborers in any degree equal to the work; but it becomes an impossible thing to them to do any considerable measure of that personal duty which should be done by faithful pastors to all the flock.”*

The sub-delegation of authority to the class-leaders is one of the grand secrets of our good and efficient church-government. Dr. Southey, on the delegation and sub-delegation of authority adopted in the Madras system of education, observes, “That which gives in a school to the master the hundred eyes of Argus and the hundred hands of Briareus, might in a state give omnipresence to law and omnipotence to order. This is indeed the fair ideal of a commonwealth.”† Such is a fair illustration of the Methodistic economy. Without the sub-delegation of authority to the class-leaders as subordinate religious teachers, the

* Baxter's Reformed Pastor, p. 261.

† Prospects and Progress of Society, vol. i. p. 105.

duties of an itinerant ministry could not be adequately discharged. They are a medium of communication, in the leaders' meeting, between the pastors and their people. In the absence of a direct pastoral superintendence, they are officers distributed in every part of the church, giving "omnipresence to law, omnipotence to order," and universality to the life and power of Methodism. They are the almost countless sentinels in the great camp of Methodism; and may no one abandon or fall asleep at his post! "Some of the others were desired to overlook the rest, that we (the preachers) might know whether they walked worthy of the gospel."* They are like the disciples who arranged the multitude in companies, and broke to them again the bread which they received from Christ. It is their duty to make that personal and appropriate application of the truth to the peculiarities of the individual members of the classes which the preacher cannot make.

2. Duties of class-leaders. We now enter probably upon the most important part of this treatise. It is here the author would concentrate his whole energies, and most earnestly invoke the special assistance of Divine grace. As Methodism depends to such a vast extent upon the classes for its vigor, simplicity, purity, efficiency, and very being, surely to the same extent the leaders are answerable for the consequences—for the superintendence and guidance of the classes are committed mainly to them. That the classes, in a thousand places, are in a languishing condition, there is no doubt; and that this sad state of things is attributable principally to the delinquency of the leaders, there is likewise no doubt. But for the solid, substantial framework and practical developement of the *aggressive* department of Methodism, it would be a wonder that we have, notwith-

* Dr. Bunting's able "Sketch of the Character of the late Rev. Joseph Benson."—*Wesleyan Methodist Mag.*, N. S., vol. i. 1822, p. 77.

standing the partial suspension of the class-meeting system, advanced at all. We do not, however, ascribe the general neglect of the class-meeting system wholly to the leaders. As preachers we are willing to acknowledge our delinquency, and take our share of condemnation for the existing state of things. Oh, that as pastors, we may "take heed unto ourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood!"* May God help us! But how shall the leaders perform their duties unless they know what they are? How few leaders know what their duties are! how few give themselves the trouble to examine what their duties are! and how much fewer still perform their duties when known! The duties of leaders are more in number, and greater in importance, than is ordinarily supposed. These we shall now consider. May God help us!

(1.) It is the duty of the leader to inquire particularly into the *inward* spiritual state of each member of his class: "to inquire how their souls prosper."†

(i.) To inquire what are their individual trials, and whether they fall by, or conquer them?

(ii.) To inquire of all whether they *now* believe? Now enjoy the life of God? Whether they grow in grace, or decline? And if they decline, what is the cause? and what is the cure?

(iii.) Whether they aim constantly at being wholly devoted to God? or would compromise their duty, and keep back a part, though a small part, a very small part?

(iv.) Whether they see God's hand in every thing that befalls them? and how they bear whatever he lays upon them, or permits to befall them?

(v.) Whether they take up their cross daily? cheerfully?

* Acts xx. 28.

† Discipline, 1854, p. 29.

resist the bent of nature? and oppose selfishness in all its insidious forms, and detect it in all its disguises?

(vi.) Whether they humble themselves in every thing? are willing to be persecuted for Christ's sake? or to be blamed and despised for doing good? or account it the greatest honor that Christ appoints them to walk with him in paths that are peculiarly his own? or are willing to drink of *his cup*? and to be baptised with *his baptism*?

(vii.) Whether they can cordially love those that despitefully use them?

(viii.) Whether in all they suffer, they seek the entire destruction of inward idolatry, pride, self-will, and impatience? and whether in the spiritual forms of these, especially of self-will, they see through all their specious disguises something of *self*, under the pretence of seeking nothing but the glory of God?

(ix.) To inquire concerning prayer, its frequency, its power, and answers;—concerning faith, its increase, or decay; concerning distrust of themselves, and consciousness of their own vileness and nothingness.

(x.) How they improve their talents? whether they have zeal for doing good, and in all they do? or have patience in all suffering? or gratitude for all they receive from God? and live above the world, and Christ is all in all to them?

(xi.) Whether they have a clear, full, abiding conviction that without inward and outward, complete and universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord?

And they may inquire particularly as follows:—

(xii.) Are you a new creature in Christ Jesus? Have old things passed away, and all things become new? Are your judgments new, of yourself, as the child of God? Of happiness, that it is not in riches, honor, pleasure, or the enjoyment of any creature; but in the enjoyment of God, delight in his service, and foretastes of the “rivers of pleasure which flow at his right hand forevermore?” Of holiness,

that it is not a mere outward, formal thing, and consists not merely in doing no harm, or in doing good, or in using the ordinances of God; but that it is the life of God felt in the soul, the image of God stamped upon the heart, an entire renewal of the mind in every temper, thought, disposition, and purpose, after the likeness of Christ?

(xiii.) Are your designs new? Not to accumulate treasures upon earth, nor to gain the admiration and praise of men, nor to indulge in the pleasures of sense, nor to enjoy and conform to the fashions, and habits, and customs of this world; but to recover the image of God, to have the life of God planted in the soul, to be "renewed after his likeness in righteousness and true holiness," and spend the whole life in the communion and service of God?

(xiv.) Are your desires new? No longer fixed on earthly things; but the whole train of passions and inclinations—love, joy, hope, fear, sorrow—set on things above? Though other desires sometimes rise in the heart, do they reign? Do you put them under your feet, "through Christ which strengtheneth you?"

(xv.) Is your conversation new? Is it always "seasoned with salt," that it may "minister grace to the hearer?" Are you ever reminded that "by thy words thou shalt be condemned, and by thy words thou shall be justified?" That for every vain and "idle word thou must give account in the day of judgment?" Is your "conversation such as becometh the gospel of Christ?"—simple, sincere, honest, truthful, humble, prudent, holy; spiritual?

(xvi.) Are your actions new? Is your life singly devoted to the glory of God? Is your substance consecrated to the service of God? Is your time employed in obeying all the commandments of God? Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, does all spring from the love of God and man, and lead to the glory of God and good of man? Do you find a measure at least of the "fruits of the Spirit—love,

peace, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, temperance" —controlling your actions? Have you increasing delight in good actions? And so in strictly religious duties? Have you deadness and wandering in public and private prayer? Have you frequently nothing more than a cold and formal attention in the holy communion? or in the preaching of the word? or in the praise of the house of God? or in reading the word of God? or in fasting? or in the services of the class-room?

(xvii.) Have you joy in the Holy Ghost, though it may not be a settled, lasting joy? Have you peace, though it may not be that degree of it which excludes the possibility of all doubt and slavish fear? Have you a measure of faith that you are "accepted in the Beloved," though it may not be the full assurance of faith? Have you a measure of love, though it may not be perfect love? though you may not have daily a sensible increase of it?

(xviii.) Have you present freedom from sin, or is what you enjoy merely a suspension of sin, and not a deliverance from it?

(xix.) Your *ultimate* design may be to glorify God, and save your soul. But do a thousand little *intermediate* designs continually and insidiously creep in upon you, such as to please thyself, to do thy own will, to enjoy thyself in eating and drinking, and in the company of friends, and in earthly happiness?

(xx.) Your desires may be new and spiritual. But not all: some old ones may remain—are they subdued? Your great desire may be to have "Christ formed in the heart by faith;" but do not little desires daily steal into the heart, and sometimes perplex you no little? And so your hopes and fears may chiefly refer to God; but then do not a thousand little worldly hopes and fears enter in disguise? and are not your desires, passions, and inclinations often partly spiritual and partly natural, partly heavenly and partly earthly?

(xxi). Do you guard against and avoid levity, slackness in good works, and despising little things? Do you attend conscientiously to the smallest particulars in religion? and do you scrupulously avoid the smallest sins?

(xxii). You may have a weak faith, but do not therefore conclude that you have no saving faith at all—that you are not justified. Mr. Wesley is very clear upon this point. “By weak faith I understand, 1. That which is mixed with fear, particularly of not enduring to the end. 2. That which is mixed with doubt, whether we have not deceived ourselves, and whether our sins be indeed forgiven. 3. That which has not yet purified the heart fully, not from all its idols. And thus weak I find the faith of almost all believers to be, within a short time after they have first peace with God. Yet that weak faith is faith, appears, 1. From St. Paul: ‘Him that is weak in faith, receive.’ 2. From St. John, speaking of believers who were little children, as well as of young men and fathers. 3. From our Lord’s own words: ‘Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? I have prayed for thee, (Peter,) that thy faith fail thee not.’ Therefore he then had faith. Yet so weak was that faith, that not only doubt and fear, but gross sin in the same night prevailed over him. Therefore, there are degrees in faith; and weak faith may be true faith.”*

(xxiii.) Do you still preserve your “confidence, which hath great recompence of reward?” Though joy sometimes dies away, and love waxes cold, and your peace is assailed, and doubt and fear oppress you, and temptation is strong and uninterrupted, and you find the body of sin remaining in you thrusting sore at you, yet cast not away your confidence,—and yet a little while and Christ will “come unto you again, and your hearts shall rejoice, and your joy no

* Journal vol. iii. p. 186.

man taketh from you." You may be tempted even to agony, and yet be a believer, as Christ was tempted, and yet was the Son of God. You may find sin remaining in you, and yet be in a state of justification, though, in the proper sense, not yet in a state of sanctification. Fear not; be faithful; and yet a little while and you shall be endued with power from on high, whereby you "may purify yourselves, even as he is pure," and be "holy, as he who hath called you is holy."

(2.) The leader is to inquire particularly, not in general terms, into the *outward* life of every member of his class, that is, "how each person observes the *outward* rules."* And what are these outward rules? They are the "General Rules"†—"all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice."‡ Conformity to these rules, therefore, is required as a test of religious character, since they are all contained substantially in the Bible; and "it is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should evidence their desire of salvation" by conformity to them. But how can this evidence be obtained by inquiries of a general nature? Indeed, it is a humiliating fact, many do not know what these rules are, probably never read them, or heard them read in their lives; and how can they answer conscientiously and intelligently any general questions respecting them? The leader cannot discharge his duty fully, nor accomplish the design of class meetings effectually, by questions in general terms. He is to be particular. There are three general divisions, each with specifications.

Let the leader take his Discipline, and turn to these specifications of religious duty, and make them subjects of particular study himself, that he may make them subjects of

* Discipline, 1854, p. 97.

† Ibid. p. 27.

‡ Ibid. p. 33.

particular and “careful inquiry.” The first general division is, “Doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is generally practised: such as”—and here follow many prohibitions. As his eye passes over these, he will find several which he knows he need not ordinarily make subjects of investigation; but there are many of them which may be made subjects of particular inquiry. Such as “The profaning the day of the Lord, by doing ordinary work thereon,” &c. How few are entirely innocent of this! to mention but a single violation, ordinary cooking. Another: “Uncharitable and unprofitable conversation.” Another: “Doing to others as we would not they should do to us.” Another: “Doing what we know is not for the glory of God;” as, “The *putting on of gold and costly apparel*—the *taking such diversions* as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus—the *singing those songs, or reading those books*, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.” Another: “Softness and needless self-indulgence.” Another: “Laying up treasure upon earth.” Another: “Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.” Alas! how general in our church is the violation of some of these prohibitions! and yet how seldom are they made subjects of inquiry, much less of reproof, by the leader or by the pastor! Let the leader, nevertheless, do his duty. Let him make special inquiry on these particulars, or he will not do his duty.

The second general division is, “Doing good, as far as possible, to all men;” and here follow many specifications. As, doing good to the “bodies of men, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.” This is a duty of almsgiving and charity. Who discharges it in proportion to the “ability which God giveth?” Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick

and in prison, are duties connected with acquittal at the judgment; and the leader may, with the highest propriety, inquire into the discharge of them. The leader may ask his class if they save any thing for the needy? if they do any thing for the poor? if they visit the sick when it is proper to do it? and so on. Another: doing good to the "souls of men, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine, that 'we are not to do good unless *our hearts are free to it.*'" In this rule there is a volume. Another: "By all possible *dilligence* and *frugality*, that the gospel be not blamed." Another: "By running with patience the race which is set before them, *denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily*; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say *all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake.*" Here are the duties of patience, self-denial, bearing the cross, and meekness, which surely are fit subjects of special inquiry by the leader.

The third general division is, "attending upon all the ordinances of God: such as," and here follow many important specifications. As, "The public worship of God." The leader should frequently interrogate any of his class on this subject who he does not know comply with this rule. This refers to the weekly prayer-meetings, or any regular public religious service. Another: "The ministry of the word, either read or expounded." The leader should be particular on this duty. Another: "The supper of the Lord." Another: "Family and private prayer." Another: "Searching the Scriptures." Another: "Fasting or abstinence." All these duties should be made subjects of frequent, special, and careful inquiry. But how few leaders know whether or not any of his class attend to all these requisitions! How, then, does he know whether the members of his class observe the "outward rules?" The design

of class meetings, we repeat, requires that he make a detailed, direct, and careful inquiry into all these matters. Otherwise, he must be, to a very great extent, ignorant of the religious state and practice of those committed to his care, and must continue so till he observe the method we have suggested, and which the Discipline requires he should observe. Without making these special and detailed inquiries, a leader may meet his class for a long time without knowing whether they are really Christians or not; whether or not they are "growing in the knowledge and love of God;" whether or not they are either experimentally or practically members of the family of God. The greatest difficulty most leaders find in leading class is the want of something new to say that will be appropriate and profitable. But no wonder they encounter this difficulty: they are ignorant of the experimental and practical religion of their classes, and hence what can be appropriate and profitable? Observe the method above, and the difficulty vanishes.

(3.) It is the duty of the leader "to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require."*

(i.) "To advise." This he can do properly and successfully only as he becomes acquainted with the spiritual condition and outward practice of the members of his class, and no otherwise. In the absence of the pastor, to whom shall a Christian, in spiritual doubts and difficulties, go for advice, but to his leader?

(ii.) To "reprove." This is sometimes required, as in improper tempers, or words, or actions; and it should be administered with promptness and faithfulness, however difficult or unpleasant it may be to do it; and yet it is to be given in the "spirit of Christ," in "meekness and love," that offenders may bear it and profit by it. And if they will not bear it, the leader has discharged his duty, which

* Discipline, 1854, p. 20.

he must continue to discharge till, in his judgment, the case shall be reported to the preacher.

(iii.) To "comfort." This is his most delightful work, and the gospel is glad tidings to help him. The church is often in tears, and sorrow and sighing are often heard in the class-room. Oh, it is a noble work, to be engaged in comforting the mourner in Zion; in soothing the afflictions of Christians; in refreshing the desponding; in consoling the bereaved; in encouraging those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness; and in exciting the ardent and supporting hope of eternal rest in heaven!

(iv.) To "exhort." The occasions in which Christians require exhortation are many: as in times of temptation, persecution, negligence of duty, declension in zeal, doubts and fears, irresolution or want of firmness, slow progress in religious experience, want of diligence in attending to the means of grace. Exhortation is a standing requirement of the leader. Every time he meets his class, it is his duty to exhort his members "as occasion requires." And this he can do properly and profitably only when he knows who are tempted; who are persecuted; who are negligent of duty; who are declining in zeal; who are oppressed with doubts and fears; who are wavering or irresolute; who are negligent of the means of grace and outward duties; who are seeking the witness of the Spirit and a deeper work of grace: and all he is to urge most earnestly to persevere unto the end.

(4.) It is the leader's duty to visit the sick members of his class. Often more intimately acquainted with them than the pastor is or can be, or with whom the pastor is not acquainted at all, the leader is prepared to extend the most grateful and encouraging attentions to any that are sick. His visits will endear him the more to them and to other members of his class, and encourage the sick, when well, to be more faithful in meeting him in class; while a

neglect of this duty will discourage them, and cause a loss of confidence in the leader. At the sick-bed of the dying saint, the leader stands at the portals of heaven, where his brother is almost at his journey's end, and where, as an inferior angel, the next step, he commits him to a convoy of superior angels, waiting to bear him to the "inheritance of the saints in light;" and he should be there to help him all he can. It will be a great encouragement to the leader to see the saint die well; he will never forget his last words and his last looks. There he will reap much of the reward for all his labors, which of itself will be more than enough. And it is his duty to inform the preacher of any that are sick in his class. And this he is to do as promptly as possible, that the pastor may extend the timely consolations of religion; otherwise it may often happen that a case of sickness comes too late to the pastor's knowledge for him to render any aid, or it may not come to his knowledge at all till the member is restored to health, and informs him that he had been sick.

(5.) It is the leader's duty "to inform the minister of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved."* The duty here is twofold, and is of the utmost importance; and it should, in both cases, be discharged with the utmost faithfulness and promptness, as all duties should be, but especially this. First, the leader is to visit those who neglect to meet their class, as also those who walk disorderly, and this he should do in all cases without delay. The delay of a few weeks, and sometimes of a single week, may be sufficient to render a case past recovery, while the earliest attention possible may arrest declension in its very commencement. The greater proportion of backsliding in our church is to be ascribed, doubtless, to the want of promptness in the leaders to visit delinquent members. A

* Discipline, 1854, p. 29.

few weeks' absence from class is enough, sometimes, so to discourage a young Christian particularly, as to cause his abandonment of class altogether, and thus is accelerated his return to the world; both of which a timely visit from the leader might have effectually prevented. Besides, young members, after a revival, may be scattered in different parts of a large city or circuit; and it is impossible for the pastor to see all the delinquent members in a single week, and attend to his other pressing duties: the leaders, residing in the neighborhood, must make up this lack of service. Besides, the pastor may be engaged in a remote part of his circuit, or called away to the sessions of his Conference, or he may be sick; and without the faithful and timely visits of the leader, delinquency, in most cases, may become incurable. But, in the second place, after the leader has unsuccessfully discharged his duty, he is to report such as will not amend to the pastor, and this he is to do, likewise, with the utmost promptness, when it becomes the pastor's duty immediately to give his attention to the case. The same remarks apply to "any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved." Profound responsibilities, truly, are imposed upon the leaders, requiring great energy, vigilance, and perseverance; and, as the Discipline prescribes, they should "be not only men of sound judgment, but men truly devoted to God."

(6.) It is the leader's duty to meet the ministers and the stewards once a week, in towns and cities, and on the circuits as often as practicable, for the purposes already mentioned, and "to pay the stewards what they have received of their classes for the relief of the preachers, church, and poor."* This is an important duty which many neglect; some, because they have nothing favorable to report of their classes; some, because they have neglected to meet their

* Discipline, 1854, p. 29.

class during the week; some, because they have nothing financial to report; some, because they are unwilling to neglect their temporal business at the time; and some, with no excuse at all. Every leader always, when practicable, should be in his place at the leaders' meeting. The Discipline expressly requires it. The duties of his office demand it.

CHAPTER IV

ADVICE TO LEADERS.

As the duties of leaders are of such importance, and so great magnitude, they should not only carefully study them, but possess corresponding qualifications, that they may rigidly and faithfully perform them. To the leaders, therefore, some advice will not be unacceptable, and, we hope, not unprofitable.

1. Let your graces be kept in lively, vigorous, and constant exercise. When you enjoy a holy, animated, and heavenly frame, your classes will feel the influence of it, and be encouraged to seek the same themselves. Your admonitions, your exhortations, your instructions, your prayers, your praises, will be sweet and heavenly to them, and your company will be pleasant, because you have been with Jesus, and he accompanies you to the class-room. You will gather the richest instructions from the work of God in your own heart, and it will be an easy matter then to diffuse a divine enchantment and interest over the labors and services of your peculiar office. Then with what a tenderness can you raise up the bowed down, comfort the mourner, refresh the bruised and almost broken heart, encourage the doubting, exhort the wavering, and inspire the strong to seek all the fulness of God ! That is, your patience will admonish the impatient, your meekness will restrain the murmuring, your resignation will encourage the complaining, your humility will chide the proud, your self-denial will reprove the worldly, your faith will embolden the timid, your love will inflame the languid, your zeal animate the inactive, your

peace cheer the troubled, your hope revive the doubting, your joy refresh the sorrowing, your experience heighten theirs, and all your abounding and overflowing graces spread the charm, the balm, and the bloom of spiritual life around the circle of the class, and increase the blessedness of the happy little family. But if you are cold, they will be cold ; if you famish, they will famish ; if you are dull in the discharge of theirs ; if your love and zeal decline, so will theirs ; if your peace and joy subside, so will theirs ; if the life of God languish in you, languor will insensibly creep over them ; if your prayers, and songs, and counsels, are formal and powerless, they will come and go unblest ; if your graces droop into weakness and confusion, theirs will soon become so likewise. A leader of a vigorous and progressing religious experience will soon revive a cold, and formal, and famishing class ; and a leader of a lifeless and formal religion will soon enfeeble and starve a lively and thrifty class. You cannot kindle the celestial fire in your hearts, without rousing a flame in their hearts ; you cannot permit it to sink in your own, without seeing it expiring in theirs ; you cannot strengthen on large and liberal meals of the bread and water of life, without beholding others around you induced to partake cheerfully of the same gracious repast ; and you cannot waste away to a sensible and painful leanness yourself, without a corresponding leanness becoming visible in those committed to your care : you cannot flourish or decline alone. O ye guides of Christ's little children, follow Christ, that they may follow you ! ye under-shepherds of Christ, lead his little flocks into the greenest pastures, and sweetest shade, and by the stillest waters, and to the richest fruits and the loftiest eminences of Zion ! ye teachers of the classes in the school of Christ, learn the more of him, that ye may teach them the more ! ye leaders of his little bands, put on the whole armor of light, and keep it bright, and

fight valiantly, with them around you, till you and they are more than conquerors ! ye helpers of the ministry of Christ, ye share in our labors, and trials, and hardships, and ye shall share in our rest, and joy, and glory at the last ! Prepare for your work and your reward. The performance of the work will insure the reward.

2. Let your example or outward life be consistent with the duties of your office. You have great advantage over most men to do your classes good, and so you are in greater danger of doing them harm. You may undo by your example what you teach by precept. Your outward lives may contradict your professions in the class-room. Baxter says to the preachers : " You may build up an hour or two with your mouths, what all the week after you may pull down with your hands ; and one- proud, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all you have been doing." And the same may be applied to the class-leader. Take the " General Rules"—do *you* keep them all ? Do *you* avoid evil of every kind ? Do *you* observe the Sabbath day by doing no *ordinary* work therein ? Do *you* indulge in no unprofitable and uncharitable conversation ? Do *you* take only those diversions that can be used in the name of the Lord Jesus ? or sing those songs and read those books only which tend to the knowledge and love of God ? Are *you*, with all your might, laying up treasure upon earth ? Do *you* borrow without the probability of paying, or take up goods without a probability of paying for them ? Are *you* doing good of every kind ? Do *you* give to charitable objects according to the ability which God giveth ? Are *you* using all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed ? Do *you* deny yourself, and take up your cross daily ? Do *you* attend upon all the ordinances of God ? Do *you* ever willingly neglect the public worship of God or the ministry of his word ? Do *you* faithfully observe the

supper of the Lord? and family and private prayer? and the love-feast, and the weekly or regular prayer-meetings? Do *you* search the Scriptures daily? and regularly, or occasionally, or not at all, observe fasting or abstinence? Or in all, or in any of these important matters, are *you* like other men? Do *your* lives condemn sin, and persuade men to duty, or condemn religion, and dissuade men from duty? Does *your* example abate or strengthen the prejudices of men? Do *you* "overcome evil with good," or are you "overcome of evil?" Are you meek and lowly, or proud and resentful? Are *you* self-denying, or worldly-minded? Do *you* speak roughly, angrily, or disrespectfully of any one or to any one? or do *you* "descend to men of low estate," especially the poorer members of your class, who are apt to confound neglect with contempt? Are *you* kind and courteous to all?—to the younger as a father, to others as a brother? Are *you* "zealous of good works," abounding especially in deeds of charity and benevolence? such as visiting the sick, relieving the poor, distributing good books, and stretching, not tightening, "your purse to the utmost," that you may do all, not the least, good you can? Do *you* rather pinch your conscience than pinch your flesh? would *you* rather have little on earth, and much in heaven, or much on earth, and nothing in heaven? or lock up your hearts, than unlock heaven? Are *you* known in your town or neighborhood as close, covetous, penurious men, or as wise and liberal stewards in your Master's service? Do you exhort your class to feed the poor, and clothe the naked, and yet do but little or nothing *yourselves*? Do *you* dissuade others from engaging in fashionable amusements and pleasures, and yet indulge in them *yourselves*, and teach and encourage your families to do the same? Pardon me, my brethren: do you warn your class against the fascinating diversions of fashionable life, and yet are *yourselves* passionately fond of them? I have myself seen—I will not say

where—the Holy Bible on the stand, and the “Life of Washington” in *two volumes*, that is, the *backgammon-box* or *chess-board*, under the stand! Do you inveigh against popular customs, such as dancing-schools, and yet send *your* children to them? or such as fashionable parties, and yet permit *your* children to attend them? or such as popular songs, and yet allow *your* children to learn and sing them? “Thou that teachest another, teachest thou *not thyself*,” and those of *thy* household? While you seek to overcome sin in others, do *you* bow to it yourselves? “For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage.” Do you reprove publicly in others what *you* do secretly, if not publicly, yourselves? Do *you* use many words in buying and selling, and are you notorious for being keen in a trade or in a bargain? Or are *you* indolent in business, and famous for your indolence? What say you to these things? But I forbear. If you plead guilty to these questions, in the name of God, my dear brethren, ye class-leaders, repent and sin no more. In the name of the church, whose interests and character you represent, be holy men. In the name of your classes, do better from this hour. Why should you be surprised that you feel so little interest in the spiritual welfare of your classes? why should you be surprised that so few of your members ordinarily meet you in class? why should you be surprised, many of you, that your classes are virtually disbanded, and your office but a nominal thing? Come, come! it is high time to awake out of sleep; may your interest for your classes be revived with tenfold intensity! may your classes, now scattered, and cold, and dead, and in confusion, be reassembled, revived, and regulated; and may your office be a real and lasting benefit to the churches with which you are connected, and to the neighborhoods in which you reside! The next advice will be of service to you.

3. Seek the highest qualifications necessary for your work.

O what qualifications are necessary for the work of the preacher! and well may he cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But you are the helpers next to the preachers, and well may you use the same exclamation. Peter says of Christians generally, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" and this may be said with greater emphasis of you as guides of Christians. You should spare no pains to be fully qualified for your work, which is far more important than the work of ordinary Christians. Yours is not the work of children, but of men of God; and you should be strong men. You must be men of great industry—"not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." You must be men of unwearied patience—"be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not." You must be men of inflexible firmness—"steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Ye must be men of unyielding perseverance—"no man, having put his hand to the plow, looketh back." Ye should be men of burning zeal—"zealous of good works," because "it is good to be zealously affected in a good work," and it was said of Christ, "the zeal of the Lord's house hath eaten me up," and nothing great is accomplished without great zeal. You should be men of the most scrupulous punctuality and exact system—"let every thing be done in decency and in order," and "at the time." You should be men of great faith—"strong in faith, giving glory to God." You should be men of perfect love, and if you are not, you should seek it—"perfect love that casteth out fear." You should be men of the deepest humility—"meek and lowly in heart," as Christ was, "that you may be ensamples to (your little) flocks." You should be men of extensive knowledge of the Bible, that you may bring out of this treasury, "things new and old." You should be men of constant prayer—

“praying without ceasing.” You should be men deeply acquainted with spiritual things—“even the hidden mysteries of godliness.” And what shall I say more? And how otherwise can you be useful, unless you be all this, or approximate to this? Let us see.

If you are indolent, how can you expect others to be industrious? If you are not patient, how can you expect others to be patient? If you are unstable, how can you expect others to be firm? If you are not persevering, how can you expect others to persevere? If you are dull, and cold, and indifferent, how can you expect others to be zealous and diligent? If you are remiss and irregular, how can you expect others to be punctual and exact? If your faith is weak, how can you expect others to have strong faith? If your love is feeble, how can you expect others to have perfect love? If you are proud, how can you expect others to be humble? If you know but little of the Bible, how can you instruct others in its truths? If you pray but seldom, how can you expect or encourage others to pray constantly? If you do not know much of spiritual things—if you are babes in Christ when you ought to be fathers—how can you expect those under your care to be men and women in Christ Jesus?

To be more particular: how can you tell what is the measure of faith, unless you know what is the measure of your own faith? If you have not victory over the in-being of sin and the world, how can you earnestly exhort others to seek it? If you know not what degree of love to God and his children you have in your own heart, how can you know what amount others have, or how to encourage others to strive for it? If your communion with God is not intimate and uninterrupted, what little interest must you feel for others in this particular! and how can you instruct others with much effect as to the manner of obtaining, retaining, and improving it? If you have not the assurance of present acceptance,

and the concurring witness of the divine Spirit and your own, how dark must be the great subject whenever you attempt to explain it to others ! If you have but little power to resist temptation, how can you encourage others to do it ? If you know but little of Satan's devices, and so often fall into them, how can you expose them to others, and warn others against them ? If you have not the power to control your tempers, how can you direct others how to do it ? If you are making but slow progress in religious enjoyment, how can you feel constrained to urge others to advance, or teach them how to advance in it ? If you have travelled but a few steps beyond the gates of grace, how can you lead others to the gates of glory ? How can you be teachers, when as yet ye need that one teach you ? How can you lead others to perfection, when as yet ye have learned little more than the first principles ?

Therefore, "go on unto perfection" yourselves. "Desire spiritual gifts." "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye *may excel* to the *edifying* of the church."

4. Your work requires more grace than the work of ordinary Christians. Your temptations are greater, for Satan follows you more closely than he does most men, and his devices will be more subtle, his solicitations more urgent, and his attacks more violent in your cases, than in those of your classes, that he may smite you down, and scatter your little bands. Hence, you will sometimes feel the strongest inclination to indolence and neglect of your duties, and if you yield, this is a great conquest of the enemy ; and when once he can tempt you to scandal of any kind, he will boast of having made the stewards of God's house unfaithful. And the eyes of the world are more steadily and keenly set upon you than upon ordinary Christians. You are always in the open light, and you cannot sin without being observed. More is expected of you than of most men. Your very

office keeps the world vigilant and curious. The "appearance of evil" in you will be confounded with *real* evil; your smallest faults be aggravated into sins, and proclaimed as sins; and should you commit any sin, quick will the world be to reproach you and the church to the utmost, and long will it be reluctant to pardon you—perhaps never. Indeed, sin in you is more heinous than it is in ordinary Christians, because you sin against more knowledge, because you violate your engagement to oppose sin, and because you sin upon higher ground than ordinary Christians occupy. And you are liable to greater trials and hardships than ordinary Christians, and certainly you have a more important and responsible work to perform than they. These things prove that you require more grace than they. Remember, the salvation of souls, and the honor of the church of Christ, are now, in a very high degree, confided to your care; and your own salvation and your own honor depend, to a great extent, upon your success or failure. Obtain the grace of God to help you, or you cannot discharge the duties of your office usefully to the church, nor acceptably to God. If the work be above your gifts, resign it at once; better do this than come off finally with deeper confusion and more painful regrets than you would have known as private Christians. Many private Christians, who over-estimated their abilities, have assumed the ministerial office, and shortly became a burden to the church, because they were unequal to the responsibilities involved, but who, while they were in private life, were useful to the church and to society. And so you may have gifts and graces for a quiet and retired life, but not sufficient for the responsible office which you fill. And it may be observed just here, that there are many in our local ministry who were very zealous and efficient class-leaders, but who, aspiring to a higher work, for which they were unqualified, are comparatively lost to the church; and in becoming preachers, vacated offices which it has been difficult, and, in

many cases, impossible to supply. This is one reason why, in many places, there is so great want of good class-leaders. The good class-leaders and exhorters have become poor and feeble preachers, local and itinerant; and at this very time they would make far better class-leaders than they are preachers; and it were wise to correct the existing evil, or, at least as far as possible, prevent it in future. But let not the humble and faithful class-leader be discouraged by this observation. Go on; you have the promise of the assistance and blessing of God. He will put his Spirit upon you, and Satan shall fall before you like lightning from heaven. Do these things, and ye shall know the rest, and do the best.

CHAPTER V

ADVICE TO LEADERS CONTINUED.

1. THE mode of leading class.

(1.) In examining the class. What we have already said at length on the duties of leaders will suggest to you what method you should pursue in examining your classes. The duty of the leader in this respect is two-fold. He is to inquire into the religious experience and external life of every member of his class. He is to see the members of his class once a week, "to inquire how their souls prosper: let each leader carefully inquire how *every* soul of his class prospers; not only how *each* person observes the outward rules, but how he grows in the knowledge and love of God."* This is not to be done in general terms. The religious state of no one can be ascertained definitely in this way; and the leader, ignorant of the particular state of the individual members of his class, cannot furnish the requisite aid or instruction to any, nor can the members of the class be a mutual help in intercourse of this nature; and the class meeting itself thereby must become uninteresting, monotonous, tedious, and unprofitable, and so shortly be abandoned. It is to be done in particular terms. This is indispensably important.

(2.) Let each member of the class relate his experience with freedom and simplicity. The design of the classes is to ascertain the spiritual state of each member, in order that

* Discipline, 1854, pp. 97, 98.

religious sympathy may be excited, mutual regard promoted, mutual encouragement obtained, and the proper instructions furnished ; and where the utmost freedom and simplicity are observed, the utility of the class meeting surpasses the power of language to describe it. But where the people are unwilling to unfold the true state of their mind, and they reply either negligently, evasively, or not at all, the very design of the regulation is subverted, and the service is both tedious and unprofitable ; this method will break down the system in any society. We should always give a plain and honest account of our religious states, especially when the mind is dull and heavy, or our evidence is doubtful, or our comforts are withdrawn, and we are not making that advancement which we should,—since there is some serious cause for all this, which may be found to exist in the indulgence of wicked and improper tempers, or in vain and wandering thoughts, or in worldly dispositions and conversation, or in neglect of some religious duty, public or private ; it may be of the class meeting itself, or in unbelieving anxieties or reasonings ; all of which we may be tempted to conceal, and so take the most effectual method to grieve the Holy Spirit, and fall into the devices of Satan. An ingenuous account of our temptations is the surest way to subdue them. But if we yield to the suggestions that our distresses are the most deplorable, that our sins are so heinous that they ought not to be disclosed, or are so trivial that they need not be confessed, or that we need not discover the whole of our depravity, or that we should give an unfair and partial account of our true state, lest we be considered very imperfect Christians, or that we should refrain from speaking freely of the goodness and grace of God, and refer in but an obscure manner to whatever in us is disagreeable and unfavorable, or beguile ourselves with the secret formation of resolutions to do better,—our testimony in all these cases amounts to nothing more than a hurtful illusion, or

partial hypocrisy, and an evasion of our duty to God, his church, and ourselves. And worst of all, probably, is the chilling, sullen silence which some observe. Thus, we hold but a partial connection with the blessed community of God's people, and consequently can enjoy but a small amount of profit from whatever else may be of a nominal and formal association. Meantime, we do not pretend that private and family concerns are to be divulged, or when tried or tempted in delicate circumstances that we are to enter into particulars; common prudence and discretion will dictate what should be referred to in general terms, what in particular terms, what should not be referred to at all, and what should be communicated without evasion and without reserve. You may relate the precious seasons you have had in public and private devotion; you may speak in a meek and humble spirit of your temptations, and trials, and faults, and failures; you may refer to your numerous conflicts, and the manner in which you obtained deliverance; you may refer to the peculiar working of divine grace in your own soul; you may especially confess whether you are declining, or gratefully declare whether you are advancing, in the divine life.

(3.) Self-examination, severe, thorough, impartial. The class meeting will be productive of but little real, lasting benefit without this. Without this you cannot relate the true state of your case, and, consequently, cannot obtain the appropriate instruction, encouragement, and counsel; and many a prayer, and song, and promise, and admonition, and help, in some form, that might have been discovered most easily as peculiarly adapted to your case, must pass without meaning and without use to you. Self-examination will suggest the very things that should be made the subjects of communication, and so furnish to the leader a knowledge of your case, that he may administer the proper relief or help. Self-examination will inform you what you

have been, what you are, and what you should be; and there will be great cause for gratitude; and there may be great cause for penitence and increased faith, and redoubling of diligence; and there may be great reason for encouragement to pursue to the end the good and the holy way. There will be no danger then of self-deception. In the clear light of the Holy Spirit, you will have a perfect knowledge of your heart; and then the path of duty, privilege, and safety will be plain as noon-day; and the very sight of remaining corruption will be accompanied with a persuasive knowledge of the cleansing blood of Jesus, and the freeness and fulness of the mercy of God; the remembrance of relapses and failures will be attended with stronger resolutions to do better in future; and the sense of a general, or any particular weakness, will remind you of the necessity and sufficiency of divine grace. An hour of faithful self-examination in the class-room will prepare you, from week to week, for the returning season of class meeting, and for the intervening periods.

(4.) Prayer. Prayer, that self-examination may be honest, faithful, complete. Self-examination, without prayer, will be a cold, intellectual exercise, irksome, disagreeable, partial; for then it must be unaided by grace, and much of the in-being of sin lie concealed in its own deceitfulness. Prayer seeks the penetrating light of the Spirit, which reveals the exceeding sinfulness of sin. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults," is the very language suitable to the service of the class-room; and he "who understands the secrets of the heart," will, in the progress of devout self-examination, not only reveal clearly all that is sinful, but mercifully exercise his mighty cleansing power in a most sensible manner. There is a liberty, a simplicity, and a power in prayer in the class-room known only to those who have prayed there, especially to those who are in the habitual

use of this service. We know there we are with the pious and prayerful; that we have met for the same object; that we are a mutual help; that we are the subjects of a mutual confidence, sympathy, affection, and forbearance; and that the very essence of the meeting is social. With what ease and delight can we pray when we know others are praying for us! Each joins in the prayer, "God be merciful unto *us*, and bless *us*, and cause his face to shine upon *us*;" and Christ, who promised to be "where two or three are met in his name," assures each of his interest in the promise, and so one helps another to claim the blessing. Prayer in the class-room is special, and is concentrated upon some present object, and this explains, in some degree, its power. Often, though the believer entered the class-room in a dull, heavy, and doubtful state, after a few moments of secret and humble communion with God, his heart is inflamed with a renewed zeal, and he is impatient to bear witness to the goodness of God. Many a time, so animating is the sense of God's presence in answer to prayer in the class-room, that we can pray most earnestly for our enemies and those who persecute us. Many a time, after a heart-searching self-examination, so earnest and importunate is the spirit of prayer, that the Spirit itself "helps our infirmities with groanings that cannot be uttered," and the heart breaks forth in humble confessions, and grateful expressions, and sobs, and songs of praise. Many a time, drawn out sweetly in prayer, in the profound devotion of the class-room, the soul acquires such a calmness and composure, as raises it above the fear of man and the agitation; which the timid, imperfect Christian often experiences, subsides, and language is uttered as in the divine presence. Many, many a time, in immediate answer to prayer, in the class-room, so intensely burns the heart with love to God and man, that the whole class is quickened by the subduing and stirring testimony given, and the very class-room seems to be a

mansion of glory, or a tabernacle erected upon Mount Tabor's shining heights. By prayer we obtain new blessings, and so are enabled to avoid the repetition of the same things from week to week, and to drop those common-place terms, and the style and manner too often borrowed from others, and which indicate a slothful and lukewarm spirit. Thus from week to week your experience will be new, original, and always interesting, because it is impossible God should forget you for a whole week, or for a single moment; and in time you will become pillars and leaders in the church of God on earth, and, finally, exalted saints in his church in heaven. Prayer prepares the man of business for great undertakings, by giving an earnestness and seriousness to the character, by repressing the spirit of levity and frivolity which trifles with solemn and important concerns; by supporting and restraining in the hour of temptation; by making simple faith mightier than wisdom; by exciting a subdued and well-regulated enthusiasm; by inspiring a calm confidence in divine providence for eventual success; by invoking the co-operation of the favor and influence of the Most High; by associating and harmonizing all the religious and secular duties of life: and so from the class-room he goes forth to conceive great plans and do great deeds. Prayer prepares all for the labors and allotments of divine Providence, and the discharge of every duty, spiritual and secular.

(5.) Singing. The meeting usually commences with singing. Few devotional exercises more powerfully raise the soul to God than singing. When the language of praise is poetical, fluent, intelligible, and the sentiments expressed are pious and scriptural, and the people serious and earnest, and the music solemn and appropriate, and the greater part of the class join their voices, there is probably no better means of exciting awful and tender impressions of God, and of increasing our love to him and his people.

Methodist hymns and music are peculiarly adapted to the exercises of the classes. For all states and conditions of the mind, and all situations in life,—the sinner's sense of his own corruption; the soul panting after redemption through the blood of Christ; the power, wisdom, and goodness of God in creation; the love of Christ in redemption; the efficacy of the Spirit in cleansing from all ~~unrighteousness~~; the misery of the wicked; the happiness of the just; reverence; praise; gratitude; exhortation; advice; instruction; warning; consolation; patience; resignation; doubts; fears; relapses;—in short, for enforcing piety to God, and love to our fellow-creatures, appropriate hymns may be found in our collection; and so, occasionally, in the progress of the class meeting, some verses suitable to the experience just related are sung, and sometimes only a single verse is sung, by which often devotion is strengthened, confidence renewed, and the heart rekindled with holy zeal.

2. Other advices.

Begin the meeting at the proper time. If but two or three are present, begin. This will soon teach the members to be punctual. Likewise conclude in proper time. Send the people away better than when they came, with their hearts warm with gracious feelings, that they may anticipate the time of meeting again. If the meeting be protracted too long, many inconveniences will follow: mothers will be improperly kept from their children; confusion will arise in domestic arrangements; the meeting will become dull and irksome; much of the spiritual good which had been received will be lost; formality will ensue; and many pressing duties may be neglected. Be short and animated in speaking, singing, and praying. A few pointed and appropriate expressions will be more useful than a long harangue or a stormy declamation, because most easily remembered.

Study your heart and experience, as well as obtain a

knowledge of the varieties of Christian experience. Your own feelings and temptations will often be those of others; and where yours are not the same with others, you may encourage them from the variety of experience with which your knowledge furnishes you.

Occasionally take your class-paper with you into your closet, and pray for your members individually. This will greatly endear them all to you; for we cannot pray sincerely for any one without loving him, and feeling a deep interest in his spiritual welfare; and God will bless you, and make you a blessing to them. Take the following case of Richard Bealey, a class-leader in England, as given in the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine:*

“Deeply conscious of the insufficiency of human wisdom and ability to succeed in the office he had undertaken, without the influence of the Spirit of God, Mr. B. earnestly sought help from the great Head of the Church by ardent and constant prayers. On the evening on which he used to meet his class, it was his custom previously to spend an hour in retirement, that he might have opportunity for self-examination and intercession for the members. Often have individuals of his family, when walking in the garden, unperceived by him, observed him on his knees in his chamber in fervent prayer, with his eyes and one hand lifted up to heaven, while the other held the list of those for whom he prayed. From papers found since his disease, written in short hand by himself, it appears to have been his practice to record, on his return from class meeting, the spiritual state of the different members of his class, that, by having it before him during the week, he might be the better prepared for speaking pointedly and judiciously to each member at the succeeding meeting. Occasionally, also, he drew out in writing the substance of exhortations on general subjects of religious duty, intended

* Third Series, vol. i. p. 150.

to be addressed to the class collectively. Sometimes he spent a great part of the night, and sometimes the whole of it, in devotional exercises, and particularly in prayer; when his family, the members of his class, and the church of God were presented in the arms of faith and love to Him who is able to guide, protect, and save. He conscientiously attended to the rules of Methodism, which enjoined him, as a leader, 'to see *each* person in his class *once a week* at least; and to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion might require; and to meet the ministers and stewards of the society *once a week*,' and sooner than miss the *weekly* meeting of his class, or his *regular* attendance at the leaders' meeting, he would quit the company of his nearest friends, suspend (if possible) his secular business, or postpone a journey. The consequence of his fidelity and zeal was, as might be expected, the prosperity of his class, the cordial attachment of his members, and a general and blessed influence upon the whole society in the village where he resided, and where his death is still mourned, and will long be mourned, as an irreparable loss."

Take another example—that of "Father Reeves, thirty-four years a class-leader in the Wesleyan Methodist Society, Lambeth." "He was never (or only once) behind time at class, or public worship. Never absent, but through sickness or distance. He never let a Sunday pass without inviting one or more sinners to the Saviour. He never went to class without earnest preparation, a careful selection of hymns, Scripture references, and, apparently, topics for prayer. He never permitted absence without knowing the cause, or immediate visitation to ascertain it. He never omitted to collect moneys in his classes, whenever they met; and he never neglected paying the amount collected to the stewards every week. He never forgot the poor of his classes; but brought his list of the necessitous every poor's night. To him the loss of members was a source of humiliation—a

matter of self-abasement in his classes. The prosperity of Zion was his chief joy. He lived in the spirit of his covenant engagements with God, being ready for *any* service, and rejoicing in all; but never neglecting any work he had undertaken. His Bible was his teacher; prayer his element, his duty, his delight. Consecrating his time, his soul, his energies, unremittingly, unreservedly, to God and his cause, no wonder he was blessed. Would it not be well if all leaders were like him in these particulars? If all were like him in these things, should we not have a holier, happier, and more useful church?"*

* Father Reeves, (Meth. Tract Society,) p. 159.

CHAPTER VI.

APPEAL TO PRIVATE MEMBERS.

1. To those who are in the wilful and repeated neglect of class. Once you were happy—alas, how cold, and dead, and worldly, and miserable now! And you may have often inquired, most seriously, Why is this so? It is a matter of experience, no doubt, with you, that when you were most punctual and regular in observing this means of grace, you enjoyed most of the grace of God. And the answer to your inquiry is, you have neglected to meet your class, which, as you believe, and we have shown, is connected with so many and so great advantages. With the first omission of this duty commenced your spiritual depression, which increased with repeated neglects, till you are now the subject of the most painful doubts, and fears, and self-rebuke. You may yet pray in private, but with no life. You may yet read the Bible, but with no comfort. You may yet habitually observe public worship and the Lord's Supper, but with no real or permanent consolation in either case. You may occasionally join in the prayer-meeting and the love-feast, but with no sensible enjoyment. You may converse sometimes on religious subjects, but with no real spiritual delight. In temptation, in trial, in conflict with the world, in affliction, under the chastisements of divine Providence, your faith is weak, or fails altogether; and probably, not a beam of real hope struggles through the appalling gloom that envelopes death and the judgment. Your's is a sad state, truly. But what is the matter? what is the true cause of all this?

In a word, we answer, you neglect to meet your class. This explains all. You lost your "first love" by neglecting this duty, and then followed the long train of other delinquencies, with their accompanying sorrowful effects, which you now experience. But relief is at hand. From this hour resolve to obtain it. Go back to the class. Go back *the next time* your class meets. If your class never meet now, go to some other class that does meet. Go, or be content to live and die as you are. But go, and never neglect class again till death, unless sickness, distance, or some insurmountable difficulty prevent you.

In a letter, Mr. Wesley thus writes to one in your state:

"**MY DEAR SISTER:**—The more I consider your case, the more I am convinced that you are in the school of God, and that the Lord loveth whom he chasteneth. From the time you omitted meeting your class, you grieved the Holy Spirit of God, and he gave a commission to Satan to buffet you: nor will that commission ever be revoked till you begin to meet again. In the name of God, set out again, and do the first works! I exhort you for my sake, (who tenderly love you,) for God's sake, for the sake of your own soul, begin again without delay. The day after you receive this, go and meet a class. Sick or well, go! If you cannot speak a word, go! and God will go with you. You sink under the sin of omission! My friend, my sister, go! Go, whether you can or not. Break through. Take up your cross. I say again, do the first works, and God will restore your first love! and you will be a comfort, not a grief, to

Yours, most affectionately,

November 4, 1790.

JOHN WESLEY."*

* Wesley's Works, vol. vii. p. 120. This letter was written by Mr. Wesley a little more than three months before his death, and shows the importance which this venerable founder of this institution attached to it. He was now eighty-eight years of age.

There is one class of those who are in the habitual and wilful neglect of class, to whom especially we appeal—we mean *the rich*. In appealing to you, we would not have you forget that you are rich, but we would have you to be alone, and turn over and read carefully the following pages, in the fear of God.

You may have been converted when a youth, in the midst of a gracious revival in your own native town or village, or in the neighborhood, and for some time were always found at the class meeting, and derived from it great advantages, and zealously observed other means of grace, and enjoyed much religious life and power. In the quiet period of youth you encountered comparatively but little serious temptation, and you gave your whole time and strength cheerfully to the services of your religious profession. Soon the future loomed up brightly, and you selected some worldly business or profession, and to it at first you gave its due proportion of attention, and as yet you were safe and happy. But presently, having commenced the career of life at the right point, and in the right manner, facilities of successful enterprise surrounded you, hope shone still more brightly on the future, and by your own unaided energy, or the promised assistance of friends, you resolved to make a fortune from your business, or acquire fame in some department of worldly ambition, and you concentrated your energies upon the accomplishment of your plans. Day and night you toiled on, with increasing success, and with success excitement increased, and you must redouble your energies. More extensive plans are formed as your means and knowledge are enlarged, and more time and care are now demanded to accomplish these. Your thoughts, your reading, your conversation, your energies, are now wholly absorbed in worldly matters: you scarcely allow yourself time to eat or sleep. Your wealth is this hour increasing—it may be great; your influence among men is increasing—it may be extensive;

your learning is increasing—it may be varied and profound ; and you have now neither time nor disposition for any thing else but how your wealth, or influence, or knowledge may be expanded to the utmost limits. And you may have married, and a lovely family is growing up around you, and home may be happy, and the family must be permanently and sufficiently provided for, that while you live, and after you are dead, want and dependence, to them, may be unknown. The children are to be educated, and they are to be settled in life in honorable and useful pursuits. The present to you now is of intense, stirring, incessant interest and incalculable import. True, you have occasionally many anxieties and painful doubts respecting the future, but they may be momentary ; you have no time to indulge in anxiety, or yield to the intrusion of fear. And sometimes you feel wearied with life and its cares, but this, too, is only for a moment ; up, up, and on : to halt now is to lose all that has been gained. And sometimes, in calm moments, the solemn inquiry is abruptly excited, Why am I pursuing the world with this phrensy ? but this is but a transient interruption : death and judgment are too dreadful and agitating to admit of a prolonged consideration. And sometimes the remembrance of innocent boyhood, and youth, and early manhood, is revived with singular vividness ; but this is banished in a moment, for it is painful to think what you were and what you are. And yet sometimes, when you dwell upon what you are, you are so penetrated with your reflections, that you *shudder* at the sight of yourself. And what *are* you now ? I will tell you what you are. You are a nominal Christian. You are a worldly-minded man. You are a formal Methodist—you may not even be that. Your name is enrolled still on the church-register, where it was when you were a boy, and a life of much perplexity and fatigue has passed since then. You are an experienced man of the world—cautious, shrewd, sagacious, honorable, influential ; but you are almost

unknown as a Christian in the church, in the world, and at home. You may be in the vigor of manhood, or on the solitary borders of old age, and you are a guide to others, with none to guide you, and the excitement of other days is nearly gone—ah! you are alone in the world. Already you feel like a banished man. Death is before you, and judgment beyond that, and eternal destruction beyond the judgment! O my God, is this the youthful convert? *Thou art the man!* And what was the first serious step that led you down this long and mournful path? We confidently believe it was *the first* time, many years ago, you neglected to meet with your class, and which you repeated till neglect became habitual, and insensibility increased, and worldliness became confirmed, and backsliding in heart became complete; and the past, the present, and the future are one prolonged series of mournful considerations, unrelieved by scarcely a ray of hope or comfort. In God's name, for your own soul's sake, rise up as from the resurrection, and as you will at the resurrection, never to sleep again; and go this hour, if possible, or when possible, and meet with your brethren, the people of God, in class again, and do the "first works," and recover the joy and the life of thy "first love," which you knew when you were a youthful convert. Hope may yet rise in the sunset. Go to your class. A sense of human frailty is daily oppressive, and daily increasing, and but for the ease in which you repose, and the affluence in which you revel, it would immediately ripen into an intolerable agony: go to your class. You might be happy, and a thousand times more useful, and you know how to be both the one and the other; and yet a strange stupor debilitates you, and a death-like langour is settling upon you: rouse up—go to your class. You cannot live much longer, and you never were so unprepared for death as you now are: go to your class. You have a great work to do, and a short time to do it in, and what is to be done must be done quickly: go to

your class. Difficulties have had a charm to you, and many times have you surmounted them, and wealth and fame have been the achievements ; shrink not, pause not, nor hesitate a moment now : go to your class. And many times, too, you may have failed in the accomplishment of favorite plans, and your strong will may have staggered on the eve of final failure, but you resisted the tremendous shock, and conquered : come, go to your class. You know the world, and you have but little confidence in most men, and there are very few, if any, who are the standard of what you desire to be ; and the longer you live, the farther you recede from what you hope to be : go to your class. You have seen much sorrow, which time only has soothed, and sustained many losses, which time only has repaired, and endured many disappointments, which time only has relieved, and lost many friends, which time can never restore : go to your class. The sunshine of youth is spent, and but few of your generation remain on earth ; you have often visited the grave, and you soon must follow : go to your class. A long catalogue of neglects and sins covers the pages of God's book of remembrance, and your name to-night may be transferred to the black volume of death : go to your class. Hell itself is at your feet, and opens, and the next moment it may close over you forever : go to your class. Go : God calls—Christ calls—the Spirit calls—the church calls—nature calls—providence calls—time calls—heaven calls—hell calls—the saved call—the damned call—memory calls—conscience calls—fear calls—death calls—the judgment calls. Go ! Oh, to be miserable the rest of your life, when you were once so happy ! to be miserable any longer, when from this hour you may be happy ! to die and be lost at last, and forever, when you may yet be saved forever ! to die and perish as a formalist, a wretched backslider in heart, when you may be reclaimed, renewed, and exult in the life and power of godliness ! Better had you died the day you were

converted in your youth ; better had you died a poor, unknown, but religious man ; better had you not been born the second time ; better had you not been born at all ! And what else shall I add ? I have only to add, *Go to your class—go to your class.* It will humble your pride—it will show you your heart—it will subdue your will—it will soothe your conscience—it will calm your spirit—it will restore your peace—it will revive your love—it will renew your faith—it will rekindle your hope—it will reanimate your zeal, and make you blessed, and a blessing to others, and an honor to Christ and his church, and you shall escape the backslider's and the rich man's hell, and enter the good man's heaven.

2. To those who occasionally meet with their class. You may be, as we have said before, in constant attendance on public worship, and regularly observe private and family prayer, and the weekly prayer-meeting ; you may observe habitually the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and occasionally fast ; you may sincerely love and respect religious people, and often converse with them seriously on religious subjects ; you may scrupulously and rigidly watch over all your tempers, and words, and actions ; you may feel a sincere interest in the affairs of the Redeemer's kingdom, and defend his cause, and his people, and even rejoice in the success of his cause ; you may give your money and influence to support his church and ministry, and the noble enterprises of his church ; you may cherish the tender charities and sympathies of a benevolent and generous nature, and assist in relieving the wants and necessities of the poor ; you may read the Bible daily, with meditation and prayer, and often feel a force in its great and precious truths ; you may occasionally and in the proper spirit meet with your class ; and in all these indulge the hope that you make some advances toward holiness, though all this may be giving you credit for more than you deserve ; but, as a Methodist, in the na-

ture of things, without a *faithful, habitual, constant* observance of this means of grace, you cannot enjoy a solid and abiding hope of eternal life; no satisfactory, scriptural evidence of acceptance with God; no deep and lasting communion with God; no sensibly progressing religious life; no enduring sunshine in the path to the grave and the judgment:—but darkness of mind, fear of death, apprehension of the judgment, and dread of hell, will embarrass and perplex you all the way; and probably at last you will die amid the most painful doubts, and bitter regrets, and dismal forebodings. This is enough to shake your inmost soul; and may it be so!

We have admitted that you have neglected but one duty, and that but occasionally. And we have assumed that that occasional neglect may prove finally ruinous. And will you run the hazard of being lost for that? To you, as a Methodist, certain escape lies but in one direction. You may be lost for work almost done, as well as for work not done at all. “*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord,*” is the seal of Christ, and the call to heaven. Prepare fully, or be lost eternally. That one duty neglected, how it troubles you! And why does it trouble you? Because it portends a lasting trouble in the future world. That one duty neglected, and how it chills and debilitates the soul in the performance of every other duty! That one duty neglected, and how it hangs like a millstone about your neck, and bows you to the earth, and prostrates you in the dust! That one duty neglected, and ere long every other duty may be neglected! But that one duty performed, and your trouble vanishes, your soul is invigorated, your head is raised from the dust, you rise and run for life, the weight is off, you are free; and the whole duty done, you are saved! Away, then, to your class, when you *can* go, every time it meets. What now is occasionally

done, make habitual, and never neglect again till you exchange worlds.

3. To the formalist and backslidden in heart. Yours is a sad case. Your peace is invaded by convictions, harassed by conscience, and disturbed by visitings from the realms of death, and the judgment to come, from which you in vain seek exemption in the cold and cheerless monotony of formal observances. Your disinclination to spiritual things is daily becoming more positive; carelessness is changing into alienation, aversion, hostility to the inner life of godliness; the remonstrances of conscience are soothed and frustrated by the easy confidence that all will end well at last; the powerful admonitions of the pulpit, which almost freeze the animation of the ungodly, are interpreted as wholly inapplicable to you; the seeds of life are falling into young and tender hearts around you, but the seeds of death have already covered your past life with noxious growth, which are now extending their roots forward to overspread thickly all the space beyond, entwining themselves with a strange tenacity around every power of your being, and exhausting daily the little vitality that remains; the very habits that you are forming are growing into a decided character, which in the end is to become an inexorable tyrant; and the very destiny which you hope to escape you are rendering infallibly certain. You are inert and buried under a burden of ceremonies, and torpid and reposing under an accumulation of responsibilities, almost incapable of being quickened into any spiritual germination; and yet presuming you shall force out some reserved expedient, before long neglect shall be fatal; that from the inveterate habits of a lifeless formality, by a mighty violence, you shall yet emancipate yourself, and then as systematically and piously prepare to die as you should have prepared to live. This lying spirit, formality, this fatal betrayer, will as certainly desert you in the final and decisive hour, when it shall have drawn you to the precipice, as the

most notorious life of profligacy and profanity. In the sight, and in contempt of the certain consequences, you go to the precipice. With the oracles, lights, ceremonies, and privileges of the church, you go. And you cannot go much farther before you reach the end.

You often complain of languor and deadness in the church, of the want of revival, and the want of spirituality and zeal in the ministry. But the explanation is easy. What are your amusements, and pleasures, and daily life? Do you pursue such only as are for "the glory of God," and that "tend to the *knowledge and love of God*?" For instance, are you not passionately fond of such amusements as *backgammon, chess*, and even an "innocent" game at cards? And you may find examples even in those professing to be ministers of Christ—we hope not in our church!—and it is a shame and a reproach to any church which they serve, and a scandal to the gospel of Christ which they pretend to preach. And you say, "there is no harm in this or that amusement." To cut the matter short, do they tend to the *knowledge and love of God*? Do they increase your knowledge and love of *spiritual* things? What is the *spirit* of these amusements? that is the question. Is it easy and agreeable to go from the chess-board to the sacramental table? or from the sacramental table to the chess-board? or from the backgammon-box to the closet of prayer? or to the altar in a revival, and engage in its holy pleasures and labors? or to devout and pleasant perusal of the Bible? or can you converse with your competitor, at the close of the game, about his soul's salvation, and the great and awful interests of eternity? or could you meet death in the game with composure? or the announcement of judgment? or the call to heaven? No, no! How then can you enjoy the class meeting, or any other means of grace? Probably you neglect them all, except those of a public character. You need not wonder that you are so languid and dead. You need

not wonder that you have no revival; you are in the way of sinners yourself. You need not wonder that you are so destitute of spirituality; you have pursued the very methods that have destroyed your "knowledge and love of God." And the end is eternal death: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

O ye dead-hearted, formal, and backslidden professors! at the very time you should be weeping and repenting in the class-room, you may be earnestly engaged in worldly amusements, or intensely absorbed in worldly business, or sedulously employed in making or receiving fashionable visits. And you think you are approaching the end of the path of salvation, when you have lost the beginning; that you are in motion toward heaven, when you have receded immeasurably the other way; that you are allured onward by the charms of the gospel, when you are following the incantations of the semblance of piety; that you are doing much for Christ, and are an honor to his church, when you are doing every thing for yourselves, your own honor, your own interest, and you see not the subtilty of the deception; that you are not wronging Christ, when you are invading his dearest rights; that you are giving every thing to Christ, when he bestows nothing upon you; that you are rich in good works, when you are poor and beggarly in heart; that you are righteous in life, when you have no righteousness at all; that you depend solely upon the free grace of God, when you have lost all you ever had, and have none remaining; that you are obeying the will of God as faithfully as you can, when you are obeying your own as well as you can; that the image of Christ is on your hearts, when it is only the dead image of fancy and presumption; that you enjoy the precious fruits of the merit of his death, when you have applied to yourselves the merits of your own cold and formal services; that you honestly confess your sins in the use

of the means of grace, when you conceal, palliate, and defend them ; that you depend fully upon the promises of the gospel, when you are exposed wholly to the threatenings of the law ; that you have accepted the blessings of the everlasting covenant, when you have rejected the mercies of the Father, the merits of the Son, and the aids of the Spirit ; that nothing is wanting to complete your salvation but dying grace, when nothing is remaining to finish your destruction but the dying breath ; that you are the hopeful heirs to “an inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away,” when you are the promising candidates for the “tribulation, and anguish, and perdition of ungodly men.” Ye formal professors ! ye backslidden in heart ! ye have done more to chill and kill the spirituality of Christ’s church than all the opposition of men and devils. Ye have done more to consume the spiritual edifice of God than all the fires of persecution that were ever kindled up in the world. Ye have done more to diminish and exhaust the energies of the church than all the heresies of past ages. Ye have done more to corrupt the simplicity of divine worship, and degrade the means of grace, than all the apostasies from the faith. Ye have done more, by your heartless and fruitless observance of the means of grace, to lead true believers from their use, than all the backslidings from the days of Christ and his apostles. Your very presence is the contagion of the second death, infecting the pure atmosphere of the church with a mortal disease, that spreads with inconceivable rapidity in every direction around you, from which none can escape, but those who, sensible of their danger, and resolved to heed the apostle’s warning, “turn away” from you. May Almighty God heal and revive you, that you may be saved, and that multitudes of weak believers may no more be deceived by the semblance till they reject and condemn the real ! May the Spirit come from the four winds and breathe upon the dead, “dry bones” of Israel, that they

may live, and rise up a mighty army in all the land! O ye formalists! ye backslidden in heart! if ye have only strength enough remaining to totter to the class-rooms, go thither, for there the warm, recuscitating breath of the Spirit will be breathed on you, and there only: for till then all your spiritual animation will be but the flashes of a spasmodic and transitory quickening; the feeble quiverings of expiring life; the death-throes of the soul in its struggles to breathe and live. True, no one in the church of God dreads the searching examination of the class-room more than you do; not one is more unprepared for it than you are. But no matter; make the best of the worst case; take it as it is to the sympathies and helps of your brethren. Confess all, and it will be a warning to others. Know the *power* of the form. And henceforth may you be found always among the humblest and happiest in the class-room, that you may be among the most pious and zealous elsewhere. My dear brethren, begin from this hour.

4. To men of business who are members of the church. You urge the pressing demands of your business as an excuse for occasional or entire neglect of your solemn obligation to meet with your class. If there is one class of Christians belonging to the Methodist Church who deserve the sympathies and forbearance of the ministry and membership, you belong to that class, and we will give your case a fair and patient consideration.

It is true, in order to carry on an extensive business successfully, powers of thought, a well-disciplined mind, capabilities of endurance, and a vigorous and well-regulated constitution, are required; that it is a "life-time torment," for which there is hardly any relief; as he who changes his business seldom succeeds; and that it is the "death portion" to many. It is true, that it requires the exercise of honesty, industry, frugality, justice, generosity, charity, forethought, and self-sacrifice, in all its progress. It is true,

that it promotes the happiness of man by contributing to the support of good laws, to the duration of life, to the mitigation of pain, to the facilities of commerce, locomotion, and enterprise, to the comforts and convenience of life, and, when properly managed, to the means of advancing the kingdom of God among men. It is true, that an energetic devotion to business, in its time and place, is not incompatible with a high degree of moral and religious culture. It is true, that business men should learn how to get, save, spend, give, take, lend, borrow, and bequeath money in the right and best manner. It is true, great success in business cannot be accomplished without *intense* thought and *omnipotent* resolution—thought in devising the means, and resolution in applying the means; *onward* is the word; and there is no limit to advancement: the old philosopher's motto, "*Higher, forever higher,*" is your own, and there is no limit to the ascent—resolution, burning like fire within you, ever removing difficulties, searching out and making means, encouraging you in despondency, upholding you in weakness, and supporting you amid the rude jostlings of the world. Yours is a life of *action*, as well as study and resolution. In the counting-house you have learned order, system, management, the practical value of book-keeping, and how to increase your interest and success in business. You have cultivated your senses—disciplined your mind—regulated your health—observed keenly—sought and seized hold of every valuable fact—conceived, resolved, and executed with the rapidity of lightning, and with the precision of demonstration—merged the charm of the end in the *intensity* with which you applied the means; and your triumph has been proportionate to the difficulties you have overcome. You have formed and confirmed the habits of business—namely, *industry, arrangement, calculation, prudence, punctuality, and perseverance*—it may be, all in equal degree, and kept in constant exercise, and constituting you:

superior ability for the enterprises of business. You apportion your time to duties, and keep an exact register of all your transactions ; you have work for every man, a place for every paper, and a time for every settlement ; and, if you should die to-night, every thing is probably so arranged that all your affairs would be understood in the morning. You calculate, without slate and pencil, and without the slightest pause, where most men pause long, and sometimes cannot make the proper estimate at all without pen and paper. You are prudent in disposing your words and actions in their due place, time, and manner ; in concealing your intentions ; in withholding confidence from entire strangers ; in doing nothing in certain disagreeable cases ; in stopping for light in doubtful cases ; in escaping difficulties ; in repairing failures ; in forming new plans and new partnerships ; in the outlay of means ; in borrowing ; in lending ; in giving ; in advising ; in almost every thing connected with your business. You are punctual in meeting your engagements, whether for the payment of money or the performance of work ; in removing trouble and uneasiness from the minds of creditors, by timely notice, when you are unable to meet your previous engagements, which sometimes happens ; in observing times appointed for the transaction of business ; in assisting your friends in times of urgent need : in a word, in the discharge of every obligation and fulfilment of every promise. You are *persevering* in the accumulation of means ; in the formation and execution of your plans ; in contending with misfortunes and failures ; in overcoming discouragements ; in surmounting difficulties which daunt weaker spirits ; in prosecuting new schemes, however arduous and unpromising at first ; in maintaining your integrity amid temptations the most favorable ; in subduing opposition the most formidable ; in applying right principles with changing times and circumstances ; in ascending to affluence, eminence, and *independ-*

ence; and in accomplishing the utmost extent of your hopes.

In getting money, you keep your word, perform your promises, and execute your contracts,—deeming what is justly implied or expected on either side as a part of the contract; disclosing to the buyer the faults of what he wants to buy; betraying no confidence reposed in you by others; taking no advantage of the ignorance or unskilfulness of others, or of the technicalities of the law, to impose upon them; making sacrifices, if required, to pay your debts promptly; not undervaluing the reputation of your rivals in business; nor raising the market-price on another buyer; nor selling below the market-price to gain your rival's customers; not unmindful of favors; frowning down all tricks, all cunning, all winding and crooked courses, all corruption, all abuses of trusts and credit; and ready to say, if bankruptcy should come, “All is lost but honor.”

You buy and sell, and sell to buy and sell the more; effecting your exchanges as directly, and simply, and cheaply as possible; abandoning, it may be, the old basis of small sales and large profits for large sales and small profits; supplying the public demand on as favorable terms as any one can offer; assuring the public that you can and *will* do this; having learned the *science* of trade by study, and acquired the *art* by practice; understanding the beautiful system of book-keeping by double entry; conducting business correspondence in a plain, clear, concise style; frequently able to tell what has been from what is, and from what is what must be in trade; comprehending its remote as well as immediate connections; exercising a sound judgment of the value of goods, knowing where they are manufactured, what are the manufacturer's prices, what the best markets to buy and sell in, and what the rate of duties; understanding so well the condition and prospects of your business in all its relations, and so adapting your liabilities to your capital as

to be guarded against fluctuations in prices and the panics of the times ; scrupulously keeping your expenses within a reasonable limit, and maintaining constantly an exact harmony between the outgoes and incomes ; calculating upon the absolute demand and surplus of goods in market, so as to make the wisest and surest investments—tracing, through the resources of the producers, the manufacturer's orders, and the domestic and importing revenues, the amount of goods coming forward ; anticipating and providing against excessive competition ; having probably a reserved capital, such as stocks, merchandise, notes, bills of exchange, &c., that is easily convertible into money as the exigencies of trade may require ; displaying admirable order in the arrangement of goods, every department alphabetically arranged, the shelves and rows of goods all numbered, and each clerk apportioned an appropriate work ; employing the most honorable methods of making money—not asserting that you have sold the same kind of goods to another at much higher prices than you are now asking—nor that your goods cost you more than you are asking—nor passing off stale goods as new styles just brought out—nor affirming that another is underselling you, and must soon break down—nor telling romances about the cost, the colors, the quality of the goods when displaying them to a customer—nor disparaging the goods of others in such language as the following : “ not the same goods at all, theirs are steam colors, quite an imitation article, and not so wide as this ; ” using the wisest and most honorable methods to obtain customers, by extensively advertising, to let every family in the country know what you are selling, and on what conditions ; not confining your advertising to the journals of your own creed or party, nor announcing your merchandise in doggerel or second-hand jokes, but soberly, with directness and decision, and in the fewest words—by politeness, not thinking yourself too busy when there is no prospect of gain, but

answering inquiries with a manifest good-will and to the best of your ability ; making a stranger your friend, though you were unable to sell him the article he wished, directing him where it might be purchased, and who subsequently becomes to you a constant customer ; neither harsh nor rigorous to your customers, but courteous, affable, and forbearing ; not counterfeiting politeness by foppery, prudery, pomp, or affectation, but natural, sincere, civil, and so adapted as to engage and please all. And your objects may be good : not to enrich yourself at the expense of the moral, social, and pecuniary welfare of the community, as in the sale of alcoholic beverages, implements of gaming, &c., but to serve God and bless mankind ; to erect barriers to the spread of vice ; to encourage agricultural and mechanical improvement ; to advance the cause of education, refinement, and correct taste ; to diffuse abroad the principles and benefits of philanthropy, patriotism, social order, and religion ; to instruct, ennable, dignify, and improve the community in which you live ; to patronize useful inventions and discoveries so far as your position and means will permit ; to foster the publication and circulation of useful literature ; to encourage the useful and benevolent societies of the times—such as temperance, agricultural, and mechanics' associations ; to support the church in all its interests and enterprises ; to live worthily and usefully, and transmit an honored name to your children.

Are you a farmer ?—you are a man of enterprise, energy, and success, performing every operation at the very best season for product and economy, and making purchases, when necessary, at the most advantageous rate ; keeping all your buildings and fences as they should be ; making the necessary improvements, and expending the necessary means for them ; keeping your implements in proper order, and in their proper places ; ploughing, harrowing, seeding, cultivating, harvesting, in the right manner, and at the right

time ; properly disposing your different fields, for economy in fencing, for convenience of access, and for a full command of pasture, and protection of the crops at all times ; wisely cutting drains for improving fields that are wet, and irrigating those that are dry, and furnishing convenience for watering the cattle ; making roads at the proper places, and in the proper manner ; furnishing every field on the farm with self-shutting and self-fastening gates ; in the choice of implements, procuring the very best kind ; in the choice of live-stock, purchasing the very best sort, though they cost a little more than others ; observing a wise rotation of crops ; and thus, with reason, intelligence, industry, order, energy, and economy, guiding in all your operations ; with clean, rich fields, verdant pastures, and waving meadows, and fine cattle, and golden harvests, success and plenty crown your labors, and waste, extravagance, debts, and duns find no place within your happy threshold.

What we have said is the best that can be said for men of business, especially merchants ; and after all this you may fail in business. Bankruptcy with merchants is almost as universal as death. Vicissitudes in trade are as variable as the winds. You may be indulging the hope of future retirement from the harassing pursuits of active business into the country, to spend the calm evening of life on a farm, in the full enjoyment of rural pleasures, and refreshing exercises, and delightful recreations, and privileged hours of reflection and independence. And you may be disappointed ; you may die a bankrupt. It has been the observation of practical men, that from *three to five in one hundred merchants* in all our largest cities do not fail, and die destitute of property ; and that over ninety per cent. of all estates settled *are insolvent*. Your ardent desire of sudden acquisition, your golden visions of easily-acquired affluence, your flattering and enchanting prospects of ultimate and complete success, may all soon vanish as your vessel is drawn within the

maelstrom, or stranded upon the rock, in the troubled sea of mercantile speculation. "Death shots have already fallen thick and fast" around you, and the wreck of many a goodly bark even now floats against the sides of your own. Wealthy houses have "fallen single and alone," and splendid families have been reduced to beggary. You hope to escape. How? By pursuing a steady, prudent course; by closing your eyes to attractive appearances; by applying plain and well-established maxims of common caution and improved experience; by not trading beyond your capital and facile means; by expending no more than you can reasonably hope the profits will be; by avoiding all imprudent expenditures; by not embarking in any imprudent and doubtful speculations; by avoiding an extravagant mode of life; and by sound morals and sound habits. But all this is not enough.

You are charitable, and you feel that charity is a religious duty. That money is a valuable means, and you study the best process of accumulation, with the view to the best *use* of it. That every man has a right, in conformity to the dictates of reason, and the precepts of the Bible, to "get all he can," but that no man has any right, according to any sound principle, to "keep all he gets." And thus you regulate an important department of moral duty. But this is not enough. Something more is required.

You are a member of the church, and you are grave and devout in public worship on the Sabbath day, and you receive the communion in an orderly manner, and this you do punctually; and you may occasionally, some of you punctually, some of you never, be found at the weekly meetings; and you may observe private devotion and many other important duties. But all this is not enough. Something more is yet required.

We have but few words more to add. All we have said, we presume, is true. But it is also true that business and religion should have such a due proportion of attention, as

that the mind shall not be so absorbed in the one as to exclude the other. That business is a test of virtue, to the moral man, and of piety to the religious man, because it is a fiery furnace to principle; and hence the Christian is in constant need of Divine support. That he who is in the pursuit of wealth may so suffer his mind to dwell upon his future greatness, and so indulge in visions of magnificence and power, as to allow the love of money to become the ruling passion of his heart, and be lulled into a fatal security, from which he will be awakened only by the approach of death itself, to find himself bankrupt in happiness as well as true fortune forever. One grand obligation, the very emphasis and intensity of which should absorb your whole being, should adjust your secular to your religious duties. The relation between time and eternity, which is frightful and incalculable, and which no rules of proportion can determine, should never be disturbed by any thing that is finite and perishable. Forget not that in age, should you reach it, worldly cares will partially subside, and your attention be called up to review your past life and present infirmities. Shall each year in lively, worldly concern glide insensibly away, to be yours no more, in which no spiritual truth is learned, no religious discipline applied, nor habits formed, nor preparation made for the stupendous and supremely important certainties of a future state? Oh check the prevailing spirit and habits of the world! Adopt a wise and constant discipline. When should you begin? This moment. Where should you begin? At the point you have neglected most. And what is that? *Intimate, habitual, Christian communion*, in the holy retirement of the *class-room*; which no business should ever cause you to neglect, unless it be *unavoidable*; and you should so arrange your business as to be always ready to discharge faithfully and profitably this religious duty. Men of business! merchants, farmers, and professional men! we sympathize and bear with

you; but do you deserve the sympathy and forbearance to the whole extent they are exercised? Can you not do better, much better, as Methodists, than you have done for many years? Why should *you* indulge, or be indulged by the church, in this prolonged neglect? Remember your solemn obligations to God, his church, and to yourselves. Say not, if you attend class meeting, you cannot make as much, and so must give less. Be it so—rather let it be so, than you should lose your souls in making and giving. But neither shall be so. *Do your whole duty*, and from this hour you shall make more, give more, and save your souls.

5. To young Christians. Your religious life has just commenced. You are connected with the Methodist Church, either as a probationer or in full membership, and you joined the church with the obligation to attend the class meeting fully in view. The first thing announced, after your reception on probation, was your assignment to such a class, and the care of such a leader, and then your obligation to meet in class commenced. From that day till the present time this obligation has remained in its original force. And now what say you, young Christians? Have you been absent from class in a single instance, without sufficient excuse? Have some of you been to your classes at all since you joined the church, and pledged yourselves to attend them? Have you imbibed the spirit of the multitude who neglect class; and do you excuse yourselves upon the ground that many old Christians set you this example? Well, then, you have made short work of your religion and religious obligations. You have come quickly to the end of the matter. How soon have the young fig-trees withered away, and the “babes in Christ” perished! Yours now is a bare profession, in which you are balancing the solemnity and force of your religious obligations with the allurements and pleasures of this life; and does the preponderance seem trembling toward the latter? Then we appeal most earnestly

to you. Alert and blooming, will you choose to spend this transitory life in ease and gayety? Will you expend your energies in evanescent pleasures and precarious hopes? By this process you will consolidate your mind into a fixed antipathy to experimental religion, and to every means of grace. The valued peculiarities of youth—its hopes and charms—its vigor and elasticity—its daring, and the animated forces of the plentitude of life, will acquire a force of impulsion which nothing can resist when youth and manhood are gone forever—when the finest portion of life is wasted, and the pleasures of the past are transformed into the deepening shades of death, and you can make but a feeble and ineffectual effort from your impoverished resources to avert the impending, long-apprehended, and terrible sequel of accumulated evils—a sequel invested with a mystery of horror, and a boundlessness of calamity—a fathomless abyss, from which neither wealth, nor fame, nor pleasure, nor hope, is ever to emerge again—advancing with the certainty of a present existence. How can you, as a Christian, look undisturbed and undismayed upon the painful uncertainties of the future? What! with concerns so momentous unsettled, and a hazard so formidable impending, will you spend life presuming you will retrieve all when life is shaking you off at last—a situation to the last degree unfavorable to preparation? This is phrensy, the worst insanity, because it is deliberate, reckless, criminal, and cannot prove otherwise than immeasurably disastrous. You may cast yourself headlong now upon this presumption, but go into the chamber of a guilty conscience—go and stand by the graves of Christians—go, in imagination, up to the judgment; and if here and there you cannot with unruffled sincerity repose upon the issue, then there is folly in your indifference, and madness in your delay. Oh, there is a freedom, an elation of spirit, in forming and preserving the grand purpose of eternal fidelity to God and his church, which, as an eternal and celestial fire,

kindles up emotions that abide in the heart with a prolonged, and a deep, and a vital glow—the more intense and animating the deeper the gloom and the sadness—unlike those of a volatile spirit, thrown off amid the glitter of worldly mirth and dissipation, and suddenly vanishing away amid solitude and solemn reflection—emotions breathed from heaven, that pass into pure passions, permanent principles, and holy sentiments—the most precious gifts and exact features of God himself, and settling into an *habitual* sense of holiness and happiness. Nowhere in the world is this purpose more easily, and firmly, and sacredly formed than in the class-room; and on no one is the duty to form and keep it more imperiously laid than on the young Christian. The benefits of the class meeting to the young Christian we have already considered, and to them we again refer you, and here embody them in our appeal to your sense of duty and privilege.

When pursued by the wrath of God, you fled for refuge to his mercy in Christ, and the church met you at the altar, and assisted you in your flight, and helped you to the cross, and so you escaped. Then you joined the church, and why? That you might save your soul. And now will you prove ungrateful to the Father who forgave you, to the Son who died for you, to the Spirit who regenerated you, and to the church who aided you? Will you frustrate your own object in joining the church? Why did you pray for mercy at all? why did you join the church at all? why did you not continue in sins? Were you sincere in abandoning your sins, in professing religion, and in joining the church? We will suppose you were. Then what means this neglect of the class meeting, and other means of grace—but especially the class meeting? Have you lost your love for Christ and his people? is that the cause of your neglect? Say you so? Then we reply, that very neglect produced this loss of love. Or do you say your objections to class meetings have caused you to neglect them? Say you *that*?

Then we reply, that very neglect originated, fostered, and strengthened these objections. Or do you say you have no excuse to give—you have done wrong—and you are heartily sorry for it? That is candid, and there is hope in your case. Especially so, as in a young Christian the habit of neglect is not yet confirmed. Beware of delay! Old formalists know and groan under its evils. Beware of the general neglect, it may be, around you! You are as responsible for the observance of the class meeting as if every Methodist in the world besides yourself observed it, or with yourself neglected it. There stands the rule in the Discipline, and uncancelled is your obligation to keep it. Beware, young Christians, we repeat, of the general neglect, if it exist around you! If you expect but few will be at the meeting, go—that none but yourself will be there, go—and if the leader himself, too, give up in despair, then go to your pastor, and request to be assigned to a class that does meet. And if the classes are all disbanded, which is an extreme supposition, then go to your pastor, and tell him your whole case, and let there be *one* at least who fulfils his obligation and respects his church. Young Christians, on you depends the character of Methodism the next generation. May you find a happy way through crowded class-rooms to the heavenly mansions, after you shall have transmitted to posterity the salutary example of a holy generation!

6. To old and faithful Christians. Ye are the substantial members of the church of God. Ye have never yet been elevated where ye need not deeper and richer truths, or where ye are unable to understand something more. The gospel is a progressive principle, whose limit is neither on earth nor in heaven, designed to develope in you the saints and heirs of God. Heed not the world's uproar and clamor—fear not its trials and its power—respect not its excitement, show, and semblance. The gates of heaven are open not far before you. Live singularly holy lives. Make a

faithful use of every thing around you in getting safely home. The prospect before you is soul-cheering and strengthening. The work already done, the obstacles and difficulties passed, the progress made, have brought you not far from the end of your journey. You cannot meet with us much longer ; you cannot be detained from the fellowship of heaven much longer, to which you have so often looked from the class-room with the purest and deepest emotions of delight and hope. Often now your whole soul is animated with a sense of the importance and practicability of making your election sure. Oh that your zeal, and ardor, and efforts, and example, may arouse a sleeping church around you ! How often have you carried home from the class-room a knowledge and a courage that gave you boldness and energy in the hour of trial, and by which you have controlled and managed your spiritual fortunes. Ye have been governed by a full and settled decision to follow the truth. Ye have attended the class meeting because it was right to do so. May the same spirit control the church to the latest generation !

From you who yet remain with us we may learn useful lessons. You tell us, time was when Methodists had preaching on week-days, and they regarded this as a great privilege, and the church was crowded, as it now is on the Sabbath. You tell us, time was when, after preaching, the pastor or the leader met the crowded class, and the power of God was displayed more in the class meeting than under the sermon. You tell us, time was when the plainest and most zealous preachers—and you mention now, with veneration, the names of many such long since gone to their reward—were most acceptable, and most successful. You tell us, time was when simplicity, self-denial, deadness to the world, zeal, punctuality, and deep religious experience, were the prevailing characteristics of the Methodist Church, and that Methodists were proverbial for these. You tell us,

time was when the ordinary conversation of Methodists was about the great things God was doing, and how they might help and encourage each other in the good way, and save perishing sinners around them, and their conversation was mingled with shouts, and prayers, and praise. You tell us, time was when the class meeting, the prayer-meeting, the love-feast, and the sacrament, were considered great and precious privileges, and that business was suspended rather than these should be neglected, and that business was none the worse for giving a day, or part of a day, from the crops or the trades. You tell us, time was when revivals were overwhelming and extensive; and it is soul-stirring to hear you recount the awful scenes of other days at camp-meetings, protracted meetings, under ordinary preaching, in the usual neighborhood prayer-meetings, and even at family prayer. You tell us, time was when ordinarily Methodists died shouting; and it is intensely exciting to hear your recitals of death-bed scenes, the glory of which, like the light of extinguished stars, still lingers in the heavens. You tell us all this, and much more. But now, as a general fact, how changed! Would to God that we could blot out much of what we have written! Would to God that the following ages may be brighter than the preceding!—that the former glory of Methodism may be the starting point of a more brilliant future! Would to God that, before you leave us, you may hear the sounds of revival universal in the land! That you may see your almost deserted class-rooms reoccupied and crowded again as in other days!—the days of primitive simplicity and power return! and the glory of God with tenfold brightness shine upon the church, and light you to your graves in its advancing splendors. And now what wait you for but this, and your dying triumph?

P A R T VI.

Temporal Advantages of the Class-Meeting System.

CHAPTER I.

DUTY OF THE CHURCH TO SUPPORT ITS MINISTRY.

“THE earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof.” He “feedeth the fowls of the air,” and “clothes the lilies of the field,” and not “a sparrow falleth to the ground without his notice.” So long as a sparrow flutters in the air, his people have a pledge that he will provide for them. God will never raise up his ministry without providing for their temporal wants. A more remarkable instance of this cannot be found recorded upon the pages of history than that of the Wesleyan Methodist ministry. The organization of the classes, which subsequently became a fundamental department of Methodism for spiritual objects, was suggested and adopted for temporal ends: no interpretation of divine Providence is plainer than that God designed that the classes should accomplish both these purposes in the constitution of the Methodist Church. We have already considered their spiritual nature and advantages; it remains for us to consider their temporal nature and advantages; and in doing so, we but return to their original design. It is proper that we should do this; indeed, this treatise were incomplete without it. We shall first show that it is the duty of the church to fur-

nish its ministry with a temporal support, and then consider the efficiency of the classes to raise this support.

1. The duty of the church to furnish its ministry with a temporal support may be clearly proved from the Scriptures.

Christ himself and his apostles were supported by pious contributions: "Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare *what was put therein.*"* At the last paschal supper, when our Lord said to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly," some of the apostles "thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things which we have need of against the feast; or that he should give something to the poor."† Our Lord's stock of money indeed must have been small, and Judas, as his steward, desired to make a sale of Mary's ointment as an investment for the poor; and so we may conclude that contributions from well-disposed persons were received for our Lord's use. The same is expressed by St. Luke: "There went about with Jesus certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils; and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance;"‡ which implies that our blessed Lord and his company were supported by the pious contributions of his followers. To the apostles he gave this instruction: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses; nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat."§ And he gave the same instruction to the seventy: "Carry neither purse nor scrip; and into whatso-

* John xii. 5, 6.

† John xiii. 27, 28.

‡ Luke viii. 2, 3.

§ Matt. x. 9, 10.

ever house ye enter, in the same remain, eating and drinking such things as they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his hire."* And a competent support was given them: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? They said Nothing."†

And so the apostles, and other gospel ministers, were supported after our Lord's ascension. The first Christians sold their estates, and gave the price of them to the apostles, to be disposed of by them for the necessities of the church.‡ To the Philippians, a church which he had planted, and from which he had received large contributions, St. Paul thus writes: "Now, ye Philippians, know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me, as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again to my necessity. Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit, which may abound to your account. But I have all and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."§ These liberal contributions the apostle calls an acceptable oblation to God, and assures the Philippians that God will abundantly recompense them. While he reminds the Thessalonians, that he had maintained himself by his own labor, "neither eating any man's bread for nought, but working with labor and travel night and day, that he might not be chargeable to any,"|| at the same time, in the next words, he asserts his right to a maintenance from them: "not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded

* Luke x. 5.

† Luke xxii. 35.

‡ Acts iv. 37.

§ Phil. iv. 15-19.

|| 2 Thess. iii. 8.

you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat; for we hear that there are some, which walk among you disorderly, working not at all; but are busy-bodies.”* From the Corinthians he refused to receive a maintenance, and this he did to silence certain false teachers, who, in order to insinuate themselves into their good opinion, preached without receiving any thing from them; and yet he asserts and proves his right to a competent support: “Or I only, and Barnabas, have we not power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock. Say I these things as a man, or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care of oxen, or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written—that he that plougheth, should plough in hope; and he that thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown into you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless, we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know, that they who minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple; and they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things.”† This is a comprehensive argument, proving that the ministers of the gospel have a right to support, from the law of nature and reason, as in the case of soldiers and husbandmen; from the law and practice of the Jews; and from the express institution of Christ himself; and therefore, while Paul and

* 2 Thess. iii. 9-11.

† 1 Cor. ix. 6-15.

Barnabas refused to accept maintenance in this case, they had a right to it. St. Paul commands the Galatians to be liberal to the ministers of God's word among them: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap."^{*} Indeed, in another place, he enjoins Timothy to take care that the elders, who faithfully discharge their labor, should have double honor; that is, a liberal support: "Let the elders that rule well, be accounted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn: and the laborer is worthy of his reward."[†]

No duty, we have seen, is more plainly enjoined in the Bible than that of the church to support its ministry. But all duties are not alike easy to perform: as for example, it is often easier to pray to God for benefits, spiritual and temporal, and to praise and thank him for them when they are bestowed, than it is to part with a small proportion of temporal things for the support of the gospel—than it is to deny one's self, take up the cross, and follow Christ in *doing* good. With many it is much easier to go to church, and listen to the ministry of the word, and receive the sacrament, and engage in the public worship of God, than it is to contribute any thing to the maintainance of the ministry of the word. But though difficult to perform, the duty is not the less imperative; and the selfishness that shrinks from its performance, so as to neglect it altogether, is actual sin in the sight of God. It is deliberate robbery of God. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even

* Gal. vi. 6, 7.

† 1 Tim. v. 17, 18.

this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground ; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts."* By withholding support from the priests, they had not food enough to sustain life, and God's worship was neglected, and the curse of the Divine displeasure rested upon the whole nation. But great temporal blessing is promised to the discharge of this duty. Give as ye *should*, and, so far from diminishing your stock, *I will open the windows of heaven*—give you rains and fruitful seasons in such abundance, that your barns and granaries shall not be large enough to contain your harvests and your vintage ; the rust, and the fly, and the devourer shall not come upon your crops ; every blossom shall ripen into fruit, and every bunch of grapes shall come to maturity.

What is dedicated to the service of the church is dedicated to God, and is so accepted by him. Thus Solomon enjoins : " Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thy increase."† Ananias was punished for reserving to himself part of the price of his land, and so Peter told him he had not lied unto man, but unto God, pretending to give a larger oblation to God than he did. St. Paul writes to the Philippians : " But I have all, and abound : I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."‡ Therefore, the withholding what is due to the church and the ministry is an injury done to God himself.

* Mal. iii. 9-11

† Prov. iii. 9.

‡ Phil. iv. 18.

2. We next inquire whether God has fixed any certain and definite amount or proportion for the maintenance of his ministers, or left the church at liberty to give what they shall think fit. It will be of use to consider the proportion which God allotted to the support of Jewish priests : “The priests had the first-fruits of cattle, corn, wine, oil, and other fruits of the earth, which the Jews dedicated every year to God ; and the price which was paid for the redemption of their first-born children : they had the voluntary oblations which the people vowed to God, and those which they offered without any precedent vow, and the remainder of things offered in sacrifice. The Levites had the tenths of all things, and the high priest had the tenth of their tenths ; and both of these tenths were to be the best of their several kinds. And beside this, they had forty-eight cities, with the adjoining territories of land, to hold as their free and perpetual inheritance. So that the Levites, who were one of the least of the twelve tribes, as appears from the computation in the times of Moses and of David, may reasonably be supposed to have had almost four-twelfth parts of the product of the country ; so that their estate was at least four times as good as that of any other tribe. And if the Levites were commonly between thirty and forty thousand, which is the utmost we can suppose them to have been, from the before-mentioned accounts, then the proportion allotted to the high priest was equal to what three or four hundred Levites lived upon.”* Indeed, the custom of paying tithes was practised long before the time of Moses. Abraham gave tithes to Melchisedek, King of Salem, not as a tribute to him as King of Salem, for he was not one of his subjects, but as priest of the most high God.† And so Jacob vowed to the Lord, that if he would provide for him

* Potter on Church Government, pp. 370, 371.

† Gen. xiv. 18, 20 ; Heb. vii. 9, 10.

in his journey to Padan Aram, and restore him in safety to his family and country, "Of all which thou shalt give me, I will give thee the tenth."* It cannot be maintained that these were merely voluntary offerings, because there is no positive injunction of the kind in the history of Genesis. Genesis contains the history of between two and three thousand years, and relates things very briefly, and hence we might just as well conclude that God did not at this time require men to worship him, or sacrifice to him, or perform any moral duties toward one another, because there is no express precept on these subjects. But we find the practice of these things stated, and the practice accepted by God; and so the practice of dedicating tenths to God, and accepted by him: and we may conclude, therefore, that it was done by divine precept.

Besides, the general agreement of mankind is an argument that the proportion of tenths is of divine institution, because nations the most remote from one another, who had no intercourse with one another, and therefore had no certain and fixed rule of acting, agreed in dedicating an exact tenth, which we can ascribe to no other origin than the tradition of Adam, or Noah, or some other patriarch, who lived before the dispersion of Babel. "In Arabia we find a law, whereby every merchant was obliged to offer the tenth of his frankincense, which was the chief product and commodity of this country, to the god Sabis. The Carthaginians sent the tithe of their spoils taken in the Sicilian war to Hercules of Tyre. The Ethiopians paid tithes to their god Assabinus. The Grecian army, which was conducted by Xenophon in their memorable retreat after the death of Cyrus, reserved a tenth of their money to be dedicated to Apollo at Delphi, and Diana at Ephesus. When the Greeks had driven the Persians out of their country, they conse-

* Gen. xxviii. 21, 22.

erated a golden tripod, made of the tenths of their spoils, to Delphian Apollo. The inhabitants of the Isle Siphnus presented every year the tenths of the gold and silver digged out of their mines to the same god. The Athenians and their confederates dedicated a buckler of gold, out of the tenths of the spoils taken at Tanagra, to Jupiter. And the Athenians dedicated a chariot and horses of gold, made out of one tenth, to Pallas. When Cyrus had conquered Lydia, Croesus advised him to prevent his soldiers from plundering the goods of the Lydians, because they were of necessity to be tithed to Jupiter. The Crotonians vowed to give a tenth of their spoils, which they should take in their war with the Locrians, to Delphian Apollo. Sylla, the Roman general, dedicated the tenth of all his estate to Hercules; and the same was done by M. Crassus: and we are told by Plutarch, that this was a constant custom at Rome. Hercules himself is said to have dedicated to the gods the tenth of the spoils which he took from Geryon. When Camillus sacked Veii, a city of Hetruria, the soldiers seized the spoils for their own use, without reserving the accustomed tenth for the gods: after this the augurs discovered, by their observations on the sacrifices, that the gods were exceedingly offended; whereupon the senate of Rome required all the soldiers to account, upon oath, for the spoils which they had taken, and to pay a tenth of them, or the full value, all which, with a golden cup of eight talents, was conveyed to Apollo's temple at Delphi by three men of the first quality at Rome. And, lastly, we are informed by Festus that the ancients offered to their gods the tithes of all things, without any exceptions.* As the general notions of good and evil are to be traced to Noah and his family, and beyond them to the antediluvian ancestors of the human race, so the general agreement among mankind

* Potter on Church Government, pp. 375, 376.

in the proportion of tenths is to be traced to the same origin; and in the latter case more probably than in the former, because the general notions of good and evil may, in some degree, be discoverable by the light of nature, without tradition; but the general agreement in the exact proportion of tenths, being in the nature of things indifferent and undetermined, cannot be traced to any rational and satisfactory cause but positive tradition.

And yet, while the New Testament asserts the right of the ministers of the gospel to maintenance, it is wholly silent as to the proportion of tenths, and that for several reasons. First, the apostles could not consistently claim the proportion of tenths for themselves, while others sold their estates for the service of the church and the poor. Secondly, in that age the zeal of the church very much exceeded the proportion of tenths. Thirdly, under the gospel, it is evident the support of the ministry is to be proportioned to necessity. Fourthly, while the church and the apostles had all things in common, there was no necessity for any special and fixed proportion to the apostles. And yet there is the same reason now as always existed, why a tenth should be appropriated to the general uses of the church; not that a tenth of every man's estate should be consecrated to the support of the ministry, but to the general interests of the church; and of this tenth the ministry should have a proportion sufficient for a plentiful support. A safe rule, therefore, for every Christian would be, to give one-tenth of his income to benevolent and pious objects. We shall refer to this rule again a few pages farther on.

3. The true church of God, in all ages, has liberally met the temporal wants of its ministry. Though the apostles obtained not a tithe from the Jewish church, yet from the voluntary contributions of their converts they obtained a sufficient support, and "lacked nothing." The same may be said of Luther and his coadjutors—and of the two thou-

sand excellent ministers thrust out of the Church of England by the act of Non-conformity—and of Chalmers, and Gordon, and those associated with them in the organization of the New Church of Scotland ; and so of the Wesleys, when they were shut out of the churches of England, not by act of parliament, but by clergymen who possessed the church's benefices—and of those men who were converted through their instrumentality, and soon became their helpers in the ministry ; and so it is now, and so it ever will be. For Christianity is self-supporting : its principles, wherever embraced, and its blessings, wherever experienced, furnish both the guiding and impulsive power required to meet all its expenses. Every Christian, by the spontaneous tendency of his new nature, will find something, however small, to give. As a body, the Methodists, in England and America, are a generous people. And yet, as there was a covetous Judas in Christ's little family, and Ananias and Sapphira, and a Demas, were among the primitive Christians, it is not surprising that there should be among us selfish persons, who either give grudgingly, or not at all. Some persons calculate what they do for religion, but not what they may gain by it—as increased industry, temperance, frugality, bodily health, temporal prosperity, the fruits of the ministry of the word, of the sacraments, answer to prayer, the blessings of Christian fellowship, illumination of the understanding, convictions of the evil of sin, impressions of divine things on the heart, and attractions to endless glory ; which worlds could not purchase, and which are freely and abundantly given to all the real disciples of Christ. But we are anticipating another part of this work.

4. The amount, in all cases, for the support of the ministry, should be such as to make them comfortable, and their work delightful. As the wants of ministers should be reasonable and scriptural, such as are confined within the limits of frugality and economy, and are not created by

extravagance, nor arise from avarice, or any species of intemperance whatever, certainly every faithful minister of the gospel should be kept by the church above contempt in his temporal circumstances, free from the cares of poverty, above want, and also have something to spare for the poor and the sick. We say, every faithful laborer should be so supported as to be encouraged to pursue his noble work with holy ardor and delight. But not so the ministerial drone. Set apart to the work of the sanctuary—called to watch over souls—and required to work in his Lord's vineyard—the minister of the gospel, in health and strength, if he will not do his work faithfully, as one who must give a strict account, has no claim to support from the church; for the sacred rule is, "he that will not work shall not eat." He is not a blessing, but a curse to his people. Let him retire.

CHAPTER II.

EFFICIENCY OF THE CLASS-MEETING SYSTEM TO RAISE THIS SUPPORT.

ONE of the most perplexing, intricate, and difficult questions that have engaged the minds of legislators in church and state is, What is the best method or system to raise a revenue for the support of government? The best abilities and soundest experience have been employed upon it. In the Methodist Church a system of class-collections has been adopted by the united wisdom of the General Conference; and though modifications of this system have been substituted in many places, none can work so well as this, because none is so consistent as this with the genius and structure of Methodism. The very basis, we repeat, of the division of the Methodist Church into classes for spiritual purposes, originated in a regulation for temporal objects. The same regulation, therefore, is designed to accomplish both the spiritual and temporal prosperity of our church. This is the utmost simplicity. Both should move harmoniously together. The neglect of the classes spiritually will be followed proportionably by embarrassment in the temporal concerns of the church, and other measures must be devised to make up deficiencies in the amount required to support the ministry. It is a general observation, if the classes were better attended, we would find little difficulty in meeting current expenses; or, if we should have a good revival in the church, the members would come up to their duty in this respect. This is undoubtedly true. And the argument in favor of the class-collections is greatly strength-

ened by the fact, that in times of greatest spiritual prosperity in the church the classes are better attended, and yield a larger supply for temporal demands. For it is easy to see that the sense of duty, the sentiment of gratitude, interest in the temporal welfare of the church, and the disposition to support its ministers—in a word, all the principles and feelings of religion that prompt to the devotion of temporal means for the support of the church—will be in the liveliest practical exercise in times of greatest spiritual prosperity. Now we have shown that the principal means of preserving and improving the spirituality of the church, is the social institution of the classes ; and then the argument is complete, that the best method to raise the revenue required for the temporal support of the church, is the proper regulation of the class-collections. We shall now mention some of the advantages of this mode of ministerial support.

1. It is a most convenient method, probably the most convenient, that can be adopted. When met in class from week to week, each member, at the close of the service, can deposit his contribution in the hands of the leader, and the work is done. This is the arrangement usually observed on the stations, and the same rule is made for the circuits. It is of primary importance, however, in carrying out this financial arrangement, that each member, if possible, be present at every meeting of his class, and be ready for the weekly collection. Some members prefer to pay quarterly, and this is done to some extent in the stations, and almost universally on the circuits. It were far better, however, if the church universally, or as far as practicable, observed the weekly payments.

2. The utmost regularity and convenience in meeting all the pecuniary wants of the church and ministry may by this method be secured. Much embarrassment to the stewards and preachers would hereby be avoided ; the labors of the stewards would then be pleasant, and the work of the

preacher rendered the more agreeable by the proper adjustment of all his financial concerns. But if few attend class, and but a small proportion of this few pay weekly, or even quarterly, then what trouble to the leader in running about town, in riding over the country, in hunting up the members on public occasions, in applying to them, after preaching, in order to gather up funds to report at the leaders' meeting, or at the approaching quarterly conference! No wonder, often at leaders' meetings, and at quarterly conferences, when financial reports are called for, we hear, "no report." No wonder, in many places, financial matters are in a languishing and wretched condition from the beginning to the end of the year, and from year to year. No wonder, a few leading persons in the church are compelled, in many places, to bear the principal part of the burden of the current expenses. No wonder that these few leading persons, in many places, are unable to meet the current expenses, and large deficiencies are sometimes reported. No wonder, that many of the most valuable men wish sometimes to resign their office as leaders or stewards; and they would do so, but for their ardent love and fealty to the church. No wonder the preacher is often seriously embarrassed by the long delays in meeting his just and equitable claims. No wonder, toward the end of the year, there is often such *hard straining* and *wrenching* to close up accounts. And yet it is a wonder that all these troubles and difficulties, and many more, should exist, when they might all be prevented by the universal observance of the easy and convenient regulation of the weekly class-collections. We want no improvement in our financial plan. Let the church everywhere observe it as it is. Then prosperity and contentment will prevail in all our bounds.

3. It provides for the payment of the annual subscription of each member in small amounts. This is an advantage of no small moment. A small sum, at regular intervals,

can be more readily and conveniently spared, than a large amount at the close of a stated term. It would be a very easy matter for any one of small means, to deduct three, or six, or twelve cents a week, and pay it to the leader weekly during the year. But it is a very difficult matter for such a one, who had deferred the payment till the close of the year, then to aggregate the whole subscription, and hand it to the leader; he might not be able to make up the whole claim at this time, and so the deficit must go unpaid altogether, as he had not laid by enough during the year for the final payment. If he had observed the weekly rule, he would have exercised a little self-denial, if required to meet the weekly payment; but, having neglected this rule, at the close of the year, he is shorn of his strength: no amount of self-denial can enable him to recover his lost ground; he has but little or nothing to give; and this is the history of tens of thousands in our church. Beside, failure or misfortune in some form, or disappointment in obtaining the payment of debts due during the year, may render it impracticable to meet the whole subscription at the close of the year; but these embarrassments might not have prevented the payment of the whole claim in the weekly proportions. Most men expend *all* they make, and *as* they make it, whether it be little or much; and the more they make, the more wants they create, so that they never have any thing to spare to supply the wants of others; and at the close of the year they have nothing to spare for the support of the church. Probably they are much in debt at the close of the year; and now what they *owe* to the church must be diverted to the payment of this debt. But had they met the weekly claim, many imaginary wants would necessarily have been anticipated, and at the close of the year, not only the debt due to the church would have been paid, but debts to others avoided.

The wisdom of the weekly contributions is supported by

the Scriptures.* St. Paul prescribed this rule for the church at Corinth and the churches of Galatia. "Upon *the first day of the week* let *every one* of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be *no gatherings* when I come."† First, the contribution was weekly. Secondly, this duty was enjoined upon *every* member. Thirdly, the contribution by each was to be proportioned to his ability. And fourthly, all this was to avoid the trouble and confusion, if not the impossibility, of collecting the aggregate "gatherings" upon the apostle's arrival. This is a wise and beautiful system of inspiration. Every member of the church, even the poorest, who is not on the poor-list, can do something, if it be but a very little.

The wisdom of this financial regulation will be evident from a further consideration. Suppose each member of a circuit, or station, numbering three hundred, contribute three cents a week : the annual contribution of each is \$1.56, and the sum total, annually, \$468.00 ; if each member contribute weekly six cents, the annual contribution of each is \$3.12, and the sum total, annually, \$936.00 : an amount sufficient to meet the annual expenses of some of our largest circuits. If we suppose the circuit to embrace six hundred members, then, at three cents a member weekly, the annual contribution of each is \$1.56, and the sum total, annually, is \$936.00 ; and at six cents a member weekly, the annual contribution of each is \$3.12, and the sum total, annually, is *one thousand eight hundred and seventy-two dollars* : and

* This plan of voluntary weekly contributions for the support of the ministry appears to have continued from the apostles' days till the reign of Constantine; who substituted the exaction of tithes by civil enactment, which became a grievous curse, in holding out the allurements of affluence, ease, and honor to a corrupt and worldly ministry. This plan of the weekly contributions was revived by Mr. Wesley, and is kept up in the Wesleyan connection to this day.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

what a large surplus have we here from such a circuit! If we suppose the circuit to embrace one thousand members, at three cents a member weekly, the annual contribution of each is \$1.56, and the sum total, annually, is *one thousand five hundred and sixty dollars*; and at six cents a member weekly, the annual contribution of each is \$3.12, and the sum total, annually, is *three thousand one hundred and twenty dollars*: and what an immense surplus have we here from such a circuit! In these calculations it is supposed that *every* member pay promptly and punctually his weekly contribution. But then there are a few, though very few, who are unable to contribute any thing; and there are many who are able to contribute these small amounts, and yet fail to do it; and there are many who are able to contribute much more than these small amounts, and yet who contribute nothing; and there are some embraced in the assessment at the commencement of the year, who die or remove during the year; and there are also others embraced likewise in the assessment, who backslide during the year; and others still, who, though included in the general estimate, cannot be found. All these make a considerable difference in the general result. And hence, ordinarily, if not universally, many have to pay something more than their *pro rata* share, and a few much more than their *pro rata* share of the current expenses. But then, if the rule were generally applied on the larger circuits and stations, the large surplus above would more than meet these delinquencies and deficiencies. That is, put down the aggregate, as above, at one thousand eight hundred and seventy-two dollars, or at three thousand one hundred and twenty dollars; and upon the supposition, that in the former case the sum total of expenses is twelve hundred dollars, which is a fair estimate for these times, and we have six hundred and seventy-two dollars to spare for the delinquencies and deficiencies; and in the latter case, putting down the sum total of expenses at fifteen hundred dollars,

we have sixteen hundred and twenty dollars to spare for delinquencies and deficiencies. Thus, in the first case, let but *two-thirds* of the whole number of members pay each six cents per week, and in the second case, let but *half* of the whole number of members pay each six cents per week, and the total amount of current expenses in each case can be easily and liberally met.

Some old and experienced financier may smile at this, and say, "This all looks well enough on paper, but how is it to be practically carried out?" True, other modes of raising supplies have so long been applied—modes that unfortunately have been adopted under the urgency and necessity of circumstances, and the people consequently contracted habits which it will be hard now to break—that it will be difficult at first to bring about the general application of the weekly class-collections. But industry, firmness, perseverance, patience, and concert of action in the official members of the church—qualifications that every official member should possess, and without which no financial system, however excellent, will long work well—will, in a short time, effect it. It may not be effected fully the first year or two, but then the result at first will be so encouraging, the difference in financial matters will be so manifest, that both the people and official members will redouble their diligence to accomplish complete success. The burden of bearing the current expenses will then be equalized. The financial machinery will then move like a beautiful piece of exact clock-work, and wind up the financial affairs of the circuit or station with as much accuracy annually as the sun itself completes the year. Those who are able to give more than their weekly proportion, will contribute it to conference and missionary objects, and other noble and benevolent interests of the church, such as the Bible, Sunday-School, and Tract Societies, the building of churches and parsonages, furnishing parsonages, and paying off church and parsonage debts.

And all the advantages which we have mentioned on a preceding page would follow, because then all the resources with which the Methodist Church is invested would be applied.

In the smaller stations and circuits, however, the weekly contribution must be larger, because the number of members is smaller. Increase the per cent. per week, and the work is done. Say one hundred members at ten cents each per week; the annual subscription of each member is \$5.20, and the sum total is *five hundred and twenty dollars*. At two hundred members, the sum total is *one thousand and forty dollars*—an amount sufficient to meet all the current expenses. Even when the station numbers less than a hundred, the wisest regulation to raise supplies is the one for which we plead. Difficult as it must be, ordinarily, for a small station to support itself, the best plan to do it is that of the weekly contributions. And it is worthy of observation, difficult as it is for the smaller stations and circuits to support themselves, they nevertheless square up their accounts at the end of the year, and, besides, contribute very creditably to the common interests of the church. And yet we are by no means in favor, in all cases, of cutting up the work into these small fields of labor, because, among other substantial reasons, we have not always the proper men to spare for them, and generally it will be found that declension dates with the commencement of the experiment. This remark is applicable principally to the smaller villages: in growing villages, and larger towns and cities, it is different; for in these the multiplication of churches is the natural tendency of aggressive Methodism, the practical effect of one of the elements of an itinerant church.

4. It preserves a lively sense in every member of his responsibility to contribute what he can to support the church. Every week he is reminded of this duty, and so every week he will feel urged to make provisions to discharge it. Under this regulation it is impossible for any one long to neglect

the payment of his weekly contribution, without a painful sense of delinquency. Here no one can be lost in the crowd. It is a very easy matter for any one who habitually neglects his class meeting, to neglect also his duty to contribute to the support of the church. He who derives but little spiritual advantage from association with the church will feel but a feeble concern in its temporal affairs, and the year will pass away with him as it does with the world. He has received comparatively nothing—he gives comparatively nothing. But he who is in the daily enjoyment of religion, and obtains spiritual blessings in the habitual observance of the class meeting, will feel a corresponding interest in the temporal prosperity of his church, and the temporal comfort of his pastor. When men are happiest in religion, they are always most liberal and cheerful in giving, and hence it is that “the Lord loveth a cheerful giver.” Let, then, the class meeting be universally observed by our church, and the treasury of the Lord will be overflowing from year to year. Every week a twofold responsibility recurs, and thus one duty enforces the other. If I neglect my class, I neglect both duties: I suffer loss myself, and neglect the temporal wants of the church and ministry at the same time.

5. Method should be most strictly observed, as it can be ordinarily done, especially on the stations. First, the time to be observed when the contribution ought to be laid aside in store—“the first day in the week;” and secondly, the amount—“as God hath prospered us.” One may give occasionally, liberally, and cheerfully, and yet very irregularly. Any deviation from this scriptural rule must be attended with more or less of inconvenience. This rule is admirably adapted to the poorer classes, who ordinarily receive the fruit of their labors at the close of the week; and even those who receive their income monthly, or annually, may easily divide the sum into the weekly proportions. The rule

is therefore applicable to both circuits and stations, and to all who know with sufficient certainty what is their weekly, monthly, or annual income.

6. All should give something; that is, according to their ability respectively. "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him."* The apostle makes no exception in the case of the poor; for he knew it was required, "None shall appear before me empty;"† and again, "They shall not appear before the Lord empty. Every man shall give as he is able; according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which he hath given thee."‡ And David is a good example: "Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing."§

7. Young converts should be early taught the duty of giving. It is not what others do that is to guide them, but because it is a plain and positive duty to give "as God hath prospered them." They should commence the discharge of this duty with the week of their conversion, that their profession may become permanent; that they may become cheerful givers, such as the Lord loveth, and that they may not contract the evil habit of indifference to the temporal wants of the church and ministry. A right zeal in this respect will lead to a regular and rapid growth in grace. "For Zion's sake they will not hold their peace, and for Jerusalem's sake they will not rest, till the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."|| The many precious promises made to the cheerful, liberal giver, are all fulfilled in due time in them. The blessing of God is conferred on what is left, and "no good thing is withheld from them."

* 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

† Ex. xxiii. 15.

‡ Deut. xvi. 16, 17.

§ 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.

|| Isa. lxii. 1.

“He everywhere hath way,
And all things serve his might;
His every act pure blessing is,
His path unsullied light.”

God will remember his friends in “the time of trouble,” and, as in the case of Job, deliver them; and, if need be, give them twice as much as they had before. The blessing of God extends to their posterity: “The generation of the upright shall be blessed.”*

* Ps. cxii. 2.

CHAPTER III.

DUTIES OF SAVING AND GIVING.

WE shall devote a chapter to the duties of saving and giving money.

1. The duty of saving money. Every Christian is under obligation to provide for himself, and, if he be the head of a family, to provide for his family. But the obligation to provide for himself and family does not extend to useless expenditure, or extravagance and excess in any form. Comfort and enjoyment may be purchased with money, but no man is justified in spending money in supporting useless indulgences, in purchasing pleasures and amusements in order to pass the time, in prodigality, and in exchange for the fashions and blandishments of the world. Every Christian, in his objects to save money, is not only to guard the honesty, frugality, industry, morality, temperance, and benevolence of his family, and so avoid leading his children and servants into temptation, but he is to practise them himself, and insist upon their practice by all under his charge, that he and they may be enabled to save as much as possible for pious objects.

Nor is any one justified in concluding that he has saved all he ought to save, when he has been at no cost of self-denial. Self-denial is a Christian duty, and every Christian should practise it, that he may give the more: and the same duty and object he should enforce on all under his control. This will add immensely, not only to his means of giving, but both to spiritual and physical enjoyments in this life, and the glory of the life to come. The vain, superficial,

evanescent emotions of pleasure, splendor, and wealth, should be anticipated and suppressed, that we may save to contribute to the alleviation of the misery and misfortune of our fellow-creatures, and the adequate support of the gospel of Christ.

2. Duty of giving. No man has a right to commence saving till all his just debts are paid. By debts, we do not mean merely those due on note, or bond, or mortgage, or book-account; but those also arising from parental obligations, relations to society at large, and to God. Charity is a solemn debt, from which no man can be excused except by absolute physical inability to discharge it. As in the world all men should bear their share in the burdens of society—that is, should contribute their proportion to the alleviation of human want, and the maintenance and promotion of human happiness and prosperity; so in the church every individual member is under the most solemn and imperious obligation to contribute his due proportion in supporting the great interests of the church, and enlarging his Maker's kingdom among men. No Christian has any right to *save* one cent till he shall have done this; much less has he the right to add his annual profits to his original capital for future benevolent objects; and far less has he the right to expend his annual profits to attach an artifical dignity to his station, and surround his family and friends with the pomp and luxuries of affluence and ease. No man has the right to set up the demands of extravagance and selfishness in competition with the requirements of religion and philanthropy. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” No man *can* be a Christian who does not devote a just proportion of his superfluous wealth annually to the cause of religion and philanthropy, and no one ought to assume the name of Christian who does not do it.

The rules and principles that apply to the *getting* of money should not be applied to the *giving* of money, for

their every profit will be saved, and nothing be given. With unremitting industry, let every Christian make all the money he can, and then beware lest he make an improper use of it. It is inconsistent to assume that a Christian should restrict the acquisition of money property to the bare limit of his wants, and then demand of him an amount of charity when he has nothing to give. It is extravagant to declaim disparagingly against secular business and enterprises, and then present a charity bill which cannot be met without the large profits of a successful year. We would do otherwise: we would say to men of business in the church, Devote yourselves energetically to the substantial improvement of your fortunes—inspect keenly and closely the world's experience for facts and principles, that will help you to be more successful in your undertakings—define precisely and carefully the bounds within which you may advance safely, and beyond which there is danger—be ready with rules that shall be applicable to specific and individual cases as they arise—be patient, devout, composed, and watchful in your journey along the thorny and devious path of business—arouse all your energy to the most exalted achievements both in business and in religion—learn the happy arts of getting the most money with the least risk and anxiety, and of using it so as to accomplish the greatest amount of good both to the souls and bodies of men—remembering all the time that you have no right to save any thing beyond your necessary wants, till you have paid all your first debts to man and God.

3. But what is the rule of contributions to effect the greatest amount of good? It is not that a man must give more than is in proportion to his income. It is not that he must give all to public institutions, and nothing to charitable purposes. It is not that he shall give all to one charitable object, to the entire neglect of all the rest. It is not that he shall give to all indiscriminately. It is to

give, if we have it, something to every worthy object, and most to the most worthy object; and if we have but little to spare, it should all be given to the most worthy objects, especially those which depend immediately upon us for support. This is the general rule.

But there are particular rules. First: we should give not only that for which we have no necessary use, but also the amount arising from self-denial. Every Christian, if he is able without self-denial to do it, should give something, and he should use self-denial that he may give the more; and if he is able to give nothing without self-denial, he should exercise it that he may give something. The poorest is able to give something. The universal application of this rule would not only liberally support all the great interests of the church, but enable the church to enlarge incalculably her enterprises to save the world. Secondly: set a real value upon money. What a thing costs is not always the true measure of its worth; as, for example, a pleasure may be purchased that is destructive either to soul or body, or to both, or hurtful in its influence upon others, or connected with evil consequences, either immediate or remote. The proper use of money is the greatest amount of real happiness it is made to purchase, and this is its true value. And by as much as a man is able to give for this great object, is he responsible for the use of money. Not one cent's less of this amount is *his own*. The "widow" could spare the "mite," and it was her *duty* to give it. I doubt whether there is one in the Methodist Church who is poorer than was this widow. And as to the rich in the church, who of a thousand has set the proper value upon his money? Thirdly: giving should be founded upon religious principles. Generosity may be confounded with piety, and selfishness with charity. Thus, charity dinners, charity fairs, charity "benefits," proceed upon false principles and feelings, in which no compassionate emotions are mingled, and for the pro-

ceeds of which no truly grateful feelings are felt by those who receive them. They are but the paroxysms of a sickly morality in the world, and a morbid piety in the church. They are occasions of levity, frivolity, pageantry, and vanity among the young people; of quarrels often among the "sisters of charity;" of lasting differences among the benevolent "managers," by which parties are formed and divisions created in the church; of patronizing worldly fashion, for the most fashionable articles must be prepared for sale; in a word, of producing more moral evil to the church than the good that is accomplished by the most successful sales, and the wisest appropriation of the proceeds. They are corruptions of charity, for that is not true charity which may be feasted away at a dinner, or dissipated at a fair, or expended in self-indulgence, or accompanied necessarily with abuse. A theatrical "benefit" for some "benevolent association," is nothing more than a measure of dissembled charity to captivate the religious sympathies common to our nature, disguise the vice of the theatre, palliate its odium, and so allure a more extensive patronage. The "charity benefits" of Jenny Lind were doubtless but the deep-laid schemes of the selfish and wily Barnum. Every measure of the kind is but a consecration of amusement to the desecration of duty and the destruction of spirituality. Give the value of what you would contribute for the fair to the object proposed, and so avoid the evils of the occasion; or give to the object proposed what you would pay for the articles at the fair, and so reach the object by the proper path. It is probable many exercise self-denial, or practise retrenchment to some extent, to support a fair: let this be done without the medium of a fair. In a word, let giving, in every case, be founded upon strictly religious feelings and principles, and the aggregate result will far transcend the nett profits of the most successful fair. If we have, in the remotest manner, heretofore patronized

methods of this kind to raise money for the objects of the church, in future let us oppose them without connivance and without compromise.

4. Appeal to the rich who give but little. Ye nominal Methodists who are rich in this world's goods, what do ye know of self-denial and almsgiving? What does your religion cost you? What do you give for the relief of the poor, and for the glory of God, rather than for your own reputation? When you were poor, you gave, and you became rich in spiritual things; but, since you became rich in the world, you have become poor in spiritual things: and now you know the whole meaning of the sayings of Solomon: "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty: There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." Ye have sat before the holy communion, and heard again and again the minister read, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life,"—and the charge has extorted from you a few pence. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye ministered to his saints, and do minister;" and God has but little to remember in your behalf. "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"—there St. John spoke to *thee*. "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again"—and the Lord owes you but a few cents. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble,"—but if you are ever delivered out of trouble, it will never be upon this ground.

And you gave your pittance—with the thunder of St. James ringing in your ears—“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you”—and what a witness!—“and shall eat your flesh as it were fire”—and what a suffering! “Ye have heaped treasures together for the *last days*”—and they shall come. You gave your pittance—and you arose—and knelt at the holy altar, and received into your hands and lips the emblems of that sacrifice that obtained so much for you, and for whose poor you had just sacrificed so little! How can you look the poor in the face when you meet them daily? How can you look Christ in the face when you meet him at the judgment, whose fires then will consume both your riches and your soul?

Is this your case? Can you be made to believe it? Let us see. We will leave the house of God, and follow you home, and make the investigation there, and now what have we? Are your tables loaded with every delicacy and sweet the seasons and the markets, at home and abroad, can contribute, or money can purchase, or skill can heighten, and do you give but a few fragments, if them, to feed the poor at your gate? Are your wardrobes supplied with every variety of costly dress and rich apparel ever-shifting fashion may suggest to the insatiable taste of your families, and yet furnish scarcely a rag of clothing to the needy in the hovel over the way? Have you built for yourself a splendid mansion, and adorned it with elegant paintings, and gorgeous carpeting, and beautiful statuary, and furniture of the latest style, while the poor man near you has scarcely a chair to sit on, or a bed to lie on? Are your gardens and lawns beautified with shrub, and flower, and fruit, interlaced with gravel walks, and winding hedges, and balmy with breeze and fragrance, while the widow and orphan on the hill-side

have scarcely corn enough to make poverty tolerable, or a tree to shade them from the heat of summer? Are your parlors illuminated with a blazing resplendence for the reception of the rich, and vocal with the song and the laugh of the fashionable, and animated with the courtesies of the gay, and noisy with the refinement of carousal and revelry, while the hut in the vale is dark at eventide, and the cry of distress is unheard in the daytime, and prayer for relief and thanksgiving for help are never enrolled in God's holy book of remembrance in association with your benefactions? We will follow you a step farther, and accompany you to the grave. The expenses of the funeral, and expenditure for monumental marble and sepulchral embellishments, it may be, will be equal to a small fortune, amounting to more in celebrating your life and death than you had expended in your whole lifetime in deeds of piety and charity. Relax your clinched hand upon gold and silver, or death will do it. You are not as rich in gold and silver now as you might have been had you invested large amounts in church-stocks. Had you wisely and properly proportioned your charities to the claims of the church and piety, this very hour, we repeat, you would have become a richer man temporally than you are—and spiritually you would be rich indeed. Then you have, for once, calculated badly in temporal matters—not that riches should have entered into your motives of charity—but such is the temporal result. So you are the poorer for the want of charity. And as to spiritual things—your spiritual fortunes—ye rich, nominal, penurious Methodists—ye are poor indeed—ye are naked—ye are in want of all things. Strike the balance quickly with God, or perish.

CHAPTER IV.

OBJECTIONS TO GIVING CONSIDERED.

1. It is vain to say you have nothing to give to support the gospel—nothing to spare from your necessary expenditures. You can spare a small sum weekly. You will be astonished at the aggregate amount of daily expenditures of small sums, compounded with interest, and summed up at the termination of any given period, as exhibited in the following abstract from the Annuity Tables in familiar use in the offices of Life Insurance Companies:—

TABLE SHOWING THE AGGREGATE VALUE, WITH COMPOUND INTEREST.

Daily Expenses.	In 10 years.	In 20 years.	In 30 years.	In 40 years.	In 50 years.
2½ cents a day or \$10 a year,	\$130	\$360	\$790	\$1,540	\$2,900
5½ " " 20 "	260	720	1,580	3,080	5,800
8½ " " 30 "	390	1,080	2,370	4,620	8,700
11 " " 40 "	520	1,440	3,160	5,160	11,600
13½ " " 50 "	650	1,860	3,950	7,700	14,500
27½ " " 100 "	1,300	3,600	7,900	15,400	29,000
55 " " 200 "	2,600	7,200	15,800	30,800	58,000
82½ " " 300 "	3,900	10,800	23,800	46,200	87,000
\$1.10 " " 400 "	5,200	14,400	31,600	51,600	116,000
1.37 " " 500 "	6,500	18,000	39,500	77,000	145,000

Thus a laboring man, mechanic, or farmer, by saving only 2½ cents per day from the time he comes of age till he is seventy years of age, the aggregate, with interest, amounts to \$2,900; and a daily saving of 21½ cents amounts to the important sum of \$27,000. Six cents, so saved daily, would provide a fund of nearly \$7,000, sufficient to purchase a fine farm. The man who lays by about a dollar per day, on the above principle, will find himself possessed of \$116,000,

and thus be a rich man in a worldly sense. There are few, very few, who cannot save daily, by abstaining from the use of tobacco, the moderate use of ardent spirits, useless indulgence, unnecessary personal and household expenscs, and extravagance of every kind, at least six cents, and perhaps twice or thrice that amount; and thus in time not only become rich, but all the time be able to contribute something to support the church. Every poor man thus can do much for the church, and none is justified in neglecting this duty. But what shall be said of those merchants in our cities with whom four thousand dollars a year is not an uncommon expenditure? with whom, fifty years ago, five hundred dollars would have been regarded as a sufficient expenditure. The difference between these two amounts for fifty years, with compound interest, accumulates to the enormous sum of over one million of dollars, and extend the time eleven years, and this sum becomes doubled. And yet how little, comparatively, do the rich give to support the church! and how generally prevalent is an unrestricted indulgence in showy habits of dress and living, which is the principal cause of the failure of nine-tenths of the men who embark in business! Instead of combining industry with economy and moderation, and so restricting expenditures to necessary wants, that they may be able to support the church generously with their pecuniary means, they are tempted to an extravagance of living by the facilities for obtaining credit which the present age affords, and so imprudent expenditures compel them to resort to accommodation-bills, and other *accommodating* means of supplying their necessities—and hardly any thing is left to give to the church. With them, the ability to borrow, or get credit, and not capital, is all that is necessary, and thus they are all the time struggling to pay their debts, instead of supporting the church, and striving to enter into the kingdom of heaven. They must live in a manner worthy of their wealth and position, and

their amusements must be of the same expensive order, instead of walking worthy of their high vocation as Christians, and exercising the self-denial required by the gospel; and shortly, their dignity and their business collapse together, involving themselves in ruin, and spreading havoc and destruction around the homes of innocent and unsuspecting creditors. They indulge a restless anxiety to do an immense business, "which a bloated credit-system inordinately sharpens," instead of laying up the greatest amount of treasure in heaven, and exerting the most extensive religious influence among men; and presently a crisis comes, and frightful bankruptcy ensues. Captivated by the meretricious dignity of a splendid fortune, they divert their attention from their regular business, and meddle with land speculations, bonus operations, with their consequent usurious interest, and other delusive enterprises, of which they have but little knowledge, instead of devoting their surplus money to the great interests of the church, and their precious time to the incalculable interests of their souls; and so both fortune and soul are in danger of perishing together. Desirous of getting *forward too fast*—of getting rich *without labor*—of enjoying the luxuries of life *before they have earned them*—they presently encounter the accumulated evils of temporal want and spiritual poverty. Inordinate passion for wealth often defeats itself, by blinding the judgment, by exciting visionary schemes and ruinous speculations in the imagination, and by impelling the adventurer upon bold and reckless experiments; and even men of the coolest judgment and most deliberate habits, under the force of this passion are rendered incapable of reasoning wisely. An almost irresistible charm seems to allure them into that dashing circle where business is most weighty and important, and expenditures are of the most dazzling and magnificent kind—where progress is downward—and ruin as certain as death—and on the outer edge of which the more cautious

and prudent will gather up the splendid fragments of the wreck at their own prices.

2. The great objection to giving is, "I have a wife and children to provide for," and the following text is used as an argument for giving little: "He that provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." This is made the pretence or cavil for providing a large estate for posterity, but it is a sad perversion of the text. The apostle refers to those who, being able to maintain their families, cast their poor kindred upon the church to be provided for out of the common stock. The apostle commands "them that have widows"—that is, whether a mother or a daughter—"to relieve them, and let not the church be charged, that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." You should indeed provide for and educate your children, but it must be in such a manner as will make them most serviceable to God; and such provision and education can never be hindered by works of charity. You should indeed make suitable and sufficient provision for your families, but this does not release you from as strong obligation to make suitable provision for the church of Christ. There must be some due proportion between the claims of your family and the claims of the church; and what this proportion is, you, as a conscientious, truly charitable, self-denying man, must determine. You may save too much for your family, or you may give too much to the church, though there is not much danger of this. In saving too much, you will leave undone those noble works of charity that would have been of greater use to you, your family, and to the world, than all your temporal gain can be; indeed, you may furnish your family with the means of incalculable evil to themselves and others in time and eternity while you are living or when you are dead. What do you call a competent provision for yourself and family? That you may be "clothed in purple and fine

linen, and fare sumptuously every day?" That was the standard of another before you. What, are you Christians, and profess to have taken the gospel as your standard? Very well, it imposes the duties of self-denial and mortification, and demands the consecration of yourselves and all you have "to the Master's use." And the world expects you to do this, and reproaches you for not doing it. "This is the will of God, that with well-doing we should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." You are constantly complaining probably of the want of more laborers in the vineyard of Christ, while you are not willing to bear your just proportion of supporting those who are now there, and many of whom are tempted to retire from it because their support is insufficient or so scanty. Now, when you have nothing to spare above a competent provision for your family, it will be time enough to lament the want of more laborers in the work of the ministry; or when you shall have done all you can to support those in the field, it will be time enough to do it; and least of all, can you complain in the one case, if your plans, and efforts, and successes transcend a competent provision for your families.

3. "I must pay my debts before I can give any thing or much to the support of the ministry." Stay, brother. What do you mean? Do you mean, that you have wisely and prudently contracted debts to enlarge your business, that you may make the more? or carry on a safe business? Is yours a safe business, and do you not certainly calculate on a fair profit at least? Therefore, your debts have become the very ground of your ability to give. How then can they be made an argument against giving? Restrained by the force of your own argument, do you deny *yourself and family* any necessary comforts, nay, even needless pleasures and amusements? Indeed, with assured prospect of ultimate success upon the basis of your debts, have you not already made certain investments of a permanent nature over

and above what will be required to pay all your debts when they fall due? Are you then honest with your conscience, and with God in urging this excuse? A portion at least of this permanent and independent investment you were able to spare, and should have devoted to the support of the ministry; and what was not sufficient to impose the restraints of self-denial upon yourself and family, much less to prevent an expenditure in needless pleasures and diversions, cannot be a valid reason why you should give nothing at all, or *very little*, to the support of the gospel.

But this not all. Admitting that from misfortune, or failure, or any other cause, you have become involved in debt above your ability to pay—that does not cancel your obligation to contribute something for the support of the church. Among your debts you are to include the debt you owe the Lord, for this is a standing debt; and in paying off your other debts, you are to pay the Lord a proportion, at least, of his claim upon you. No matter what is the amount of your indebtedness to others, God's claim still stands as good as theirs. Of course in this case your contribution to charitable purposes must be less than it would be if you were free from debt. It may be objected, "this is robbing your creditors to support the church." But otherwise it would be robbing the Lord to pay your creditors, just as it would be robbing one creditor to pay the rest. Again, it may be objected, "a man must be *just* before he can be generous." Granted; but the claim of God is not one of generosity, but of *justice*, and so is supported by the objection. Again, it may be argued, "every one is to lay by in store"—for charitable objects—"as the Lord has *prospered* him." That is true, and therefore you may have but a small proportion to spare from other claims, to meet God's claims upon him. Again, it may be argued, in the case of insolvency God will waive *his* claims in behalf of other creditors. That is more to the point, but this is the very question at issue. Prove this,

and we yield. You may still argue, My misfortunes have come upon me by God's permission or dispensation, and therefore God himself has cancelled his claim upon me. That he permitted your misfortune is very probable, and yet you are responsible for the consequences of it if you might have prevented it, and consequently your obligation to God is uncancelled, as your obligation to any other creditor is. That he caused your misfortune remains to be proved. You may still urge, "Owe no man any thing." But you have already broken this precept—you are insolvent. The question is, whether you shall now include the Lord among your creditors or not, and in paying off all the claims against you, you shall not pay the Lord a proportion of his. But it may be further argued, "I am commanded by the Lord to be honest, and how can I be strictly so to my fellow-men if I appropriate to charitable objects any thing necessarily required to pay my just debts? Is not this putting it out of my power to be strictly honest?" Not at all; for by being strictly honest to the Lord, he will enable you to pay off all your just debts to others. The little he requires of you under your present circumstances, compared with what you should give were you wholly unembarrassed, cannot sensibly effect the respective payments required in meeting the claims of your creditors. The claim of the Lord is as just and standing a claim as that of your family to support, of your children to education, and your country to your annual tax. You should now, it is true, be more frugal, economical, and self-denying, that you may as soon as possible meet all the demands of your indebtedness. That is now your plain and urgent duty, and this is all that can be justly required of you. Are you pressing all your energies in this direction? Are you confining your personal and family expenses within as small a compass as your exigency requires? Have you diminished these within the bounds of prudence, that you may be enabled to liquidate these

claims? If not, why should you wish to abstract the whole claim of the Lord to do it? The Lord is willing to share with you and your family in the urgent demands of others upon you; but he is not willing, we maintain, to surrender his whole claim, and be excluded from all regard in this matter.

But, we inquire, how much did you give to charitable objects, and the support of the ministry, while you were unembarrassed by debts? Would withholding *that* now help you much? Are your annual, personal, and family expenses less now than they were when you were unembarrassed? Is not this objection to giving a recent thing with you, suggested by a loss in religion, an increase in embarrassment, and an indisposition to subject yourself to the painful exercise of the practical virtues just now mentioned? Has it ever occurred to you, unless unavoidable misfortune plunged you into debt, that it is surprising you should now be so scrupulously honest to get out of debt, and yet were not honest enough to keep out of debt? Presuming that you have given something to pious objects since you became so deeply involved, has it *sensibly* lessened your ability to extricate yourself? Or presuming that you have given nothing to pious objects of late, has it *sensibly* increased your ability to liquidate the claims of your creditors? Are you so poor now, that you cannot spare *two mites*? Are you poorer than the widow who gave them? We will examine the objection no farther, but suggest what we think is your plain duty. It is this: after meeting your *necessary* expenses, and devoting what you conscientiously can to pious objects, you should give every cent remaining of your income to liquidating your just debts.

4. It may be objected, "The poor cannot afford to give any thing." The real poor cannot, and nothing of the kind is expected of them. But those who can spare something, however small, and yet withhold it, cannot feel much

interest either in Christ's cause or in his service—their attainments will be superficial, their comforts evanescent, and their progress slow. But whatever the poor or the rich give, from a right principle, to the cause of Christ, God will surely return, in some form, a hundred-fold. The poor and pious widow of Zarephath obtained, for the cake she prepared for Elijah, the barrel of meal that wasted not, and the cruse of oil that failed not; and she gained by giving, though it seemed she and her son would perish by giving. Though God may not employ a miracle again to relieve the pious poor, yet he is the God of providence, and superintends the wants of his people as certainly and as well as he did the widow in her poverty. Not only so, God positively commands, that "*every* man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee;*" and "*let every* man lay by him in store as God hath prospered him."† The poorest of the poor who can give any thing are all included. Christ did not disapprove the liberality of the poor woman who cast her two mites into the treasury, though this was *all* she had. How easily can he return a hundred-fold, if not in kind, at least in quantity! and he will do it. If, while on earth, he could find a fish to contribute to the payment of his tax and Peter's, and magnify a few loaves and fishes to feed famishing thousands, his resources will not fail now he is in heaven. Nor is this all. The poor can give something. As their income is small, but little is required. Indeed, many, with a small income, do expend more than a tenth, probably, in useless self-indulgence, as in the use of tobacco, snuff, and other articles equally unprofitable; and this may be the reason why they not only give little or nothing to the church, but why they are kept poor so long. They who at most can spare but little, are not as economical

* Deut. xvi. 16, 17.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

as the rich, who can spare so much, and yet often give so little. They are not as diligent in business as they should be; nor do they redeem every moment of their time as they should; nor do they make their income go as far as possible. How much time is wasted by them in useless visits and unprofitable conversation! What amounts do they spend annually, either for themselves or their children, or both, in gratifying a vain curiosity in popular amusements! What vain and idle habits do they indulge, and in how many ways, by bits and drops, do their small and hard earnings disappear almost as soon as they come into hand, and little or nothing is left for Christ and his cause! Let the poor be diligent, economical, self-denying, redeeming the time, and obtain the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, and every week of health and prosperity will witness, at its close, a cheerful and a generous contribution to the support of the church. No real comfort is lessened by giving, but rather increased, and the comfort of giving is superadded. They but return to God what they can spare: "For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."*

* 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

CHAPTER V

APPEAL IN BEHALF OF THE METHODIST MINISTRY, AND THE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS OF DECEASED PREACHERS.

WE shall close this treatise with an appeal to Methodists in behalf of their ministry, and the widows and orphans of deceased preachers.

Your preachers are under the most solemn obligation to preach the gospel—a work from which they cannot retire at pleasure, and which, as itinerants, they cannot neglect, to provide the things of this life for themselves and their families; and, therefore, necessity is laid upon you to support them, and religious obligation and common honesty bind you to do it. They should not be forced to neglect men's souls, but “give themselves wholly to these things,” and surely you should not neglect their bodies. Their whole business is for another world—to spend all life in studying and preaching Christ—in searching into his mysteries of spiritual life, and meditating upon the nature, works, and ways of the blessed God—to engage in acts of prayer and praise, and talk of God and glory—to learn the more of God, and become the better, that they may teach you the more, and make you the better—to find the way nearer to heaven themselves, that they may lead you the nearer to that happy country.

By their call to the ministry *they are related to Christ*, and, therefore, in maintaining them, you maintain the cause of Christ. And, by their call to the ministry, *they are related to you as the flock of Christ*, and, therefore, in main-

taining them, you maintain your own cause. In the former case, there cannot be so noble a demand for the use of money ; in the latter case, there cannot be a more important demand for the use of money : in the one case, you cannot neglect the ministry without neglecting the cause of Christ ; in the other case, you cannot neglect them without neglecting your own cause. The penurious may suppose that they can enjoy the advantages of the Christian ministry, though they give but little. We reject the premises, and hence deny the conclusion. The general advantages of national and domestic morality the penurious man may enjoy, but nothing further. He that is able to give much, but gives little, or he that is able to give little, but gives nothing, cannot enjoy one single real and permanent spiritual blessing under the gospel ministry—not one. The fact that he is *penurious* is demonstration that the gospel has as yet done nothing for him. As he cannot spare his money for the cause of Christ, he cannot be a Christian, whatever may be his pretensions or his cavils ; for Christ calls upon no man for that which he cannot spare ; and he can feel but little or no interest in his own cause for which he gives but little or nothing.

“That man may *last*, but never *lives*,
Who much receives, but nothing gives ;
Whom none can love, whom none can thank—
Creation’s blot, creation’s blank.”

An itinerant ministry cannot be supported by secular employments, for they have left these—their homes, and friends, and trades, and business, and profession, and all—for the exclusive work of the ministry ; they have abandoned these their secular hopes for your sakes. Rather than leave your souls in want, they have surrendered the means, the only means, all the means, they had to supply the wants of their bodies. They conducted you to the cross of Christ, and are now conducting you toward heaven, and can you overlook their temporal wants on the way ? They are be-

stowing upon you their utmost cost and labor, to alleviate all your spiritual sufferings, supply all your spiritual necessities, and prepare you to see God face to face, and live forever with him in glory; and do they not deserve the best of your temporal care and help? They are not willing that a single one of you, as the sheep of Christ, should suffer or want; and are you willing that they should know or suffer temporal want? They weep over your spiritual need, and teach, and preach, and pray, and fast, and labor, that you may be supplied with spiritual food and clothing on earth, and a mansion in heaven; and can you spare nothing to furnish them with food to eat, and clothes to wear, and a house to live in a single year or two? They grieve when you grieve, and rejoice when you rejoice; and have you no sympathy for their sorrow, and no means to spare to make them happy? They do all they can to save your families; and are you doing as little as you can to comfort their families? they wish to see poured out upon you of spiritual blessings "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over;" and can you be content while they receive a measure barely sufficient to supply the common necessities of life? Is your heaven to be purchased at so dear a rate to Christ, and obtained at so great a cost to his ministers, and yet cost *you* so little? Christ walketh among his ministers—remember his presence—he will support them—support them he will, if he must do it without your assistance—support them he will, if he must call the ravens again to his aid. Indeed, many living Methodist ministers can say, God has interposed almost as mysteriously oft-times in relieving their temporal wants, as the ravens surprised Elijah on the mountain.

You complain when the minister neglects any of his important duties, and often when he neglects them in the smallest particular; and, indeed, any neglect of duty on their part is of the gravest importance, for it is a neglect

of the interests of souls committed to their care by Christ, and for whom Christ died. But have they no just ground of complaint against you for the neglect of your duty toward them? It may be, it is most probable, in many cases, their neglect was caused by yours. Embarrassed in temporal matters, they are often embarrassed in the discharge of their official duties. Keep the faithful minister clear of the world, and you will know all his power. But, if he must bear along you and also the debts you should have justly enabled him to pay, you need not be surprised if sometimes he is tempted to neglect *you* to look after his temporal affairs. In fact, they are your debts, and God is your security for their payment; and if you fail, and the minister nevertheless do his duty faithfully, and call upon God, he will most certainly pay them all off to the last farthing.

If we go into debt, it is for your sakes; and if we go into debt beyond our appropriation, that is not your fault, unless the appropriation is insufficient to meet necessary current expenses, and then who is to bear the burden of the deficiency? Brethren, let me speak to your hearts and consciences. Sometimes, for your sakes, out of the appropriation which you make for *our* support, we purchase a horse, and the means of conveying us to our work—and this is for your sakes. Should we receive the *whole* appropriation, we have nothing to spare for this expense on a circuit or district; and, if we fail to receive the whole appropriation, we are seriously embarrassed, unless we have some independent resource to which to apply, and to which you have no claim. It is a hard case to preach the gospel, and be compelled to bear the expense of it, too, when “the laborer is worthy of his hire.” But very few have this independent resource, and what can they do in case of deficiency? And when, in addition, the allowance is too small to meet necessary expenses, though it should all be paid, what must be the condition of those who must endure the

deficiency—to what quarter are they to look for relief? And when an insufficient allowance is not all paid, it is obvious the embarrassment of the preacher and his family must be greatly aggravated. It may be replied, that the horse, &c. may be sold subsequently, and thus the expenditure be restored. Not so; for the horse may be old now, and worn down in your service, and the carriage and harness worn out, or greatly impaired in value, and can be sold, and sold they must be, at a price greatly reduced from the original cost—and the preacher alone must bear and feel this loss. The little money that was saved, by self-denial and economy, to school our children, and enlarge our library, is thus consumed for another purpose—the children must do as well as they can with a little schooling, and we must be content with the books we have, or not complain if we are compelled to sell a few of the little we have to pay our pressing debts; for, as ministers, we must be honorable men. And all this is for your sakes.

But this is not all. At the close of a long life of labor, and toil, and suffering, and hardships of various kinds, one of these self-denying poor men, in the bosom of his weeping wife and children, and among strangers, dies—and you scarcely *ever after hear of his family*. They have suddenly vanished in the great forest of human society. What has become of the widow and orphans of your good old pastor? Where are they? *They may be dead, too.* Do you ever inquire if they are living, and how they are getting along? and what do you give to help them along? Ah! if you gave little or nothing to support them while the husband and father lived and labored for you, you will give little or nothing to help them now he is dead, and can do no more work for you. Stop, man; you are indebted to *the dead*—pay that thou owest to his *widow and children*—pay principal and interest. But the widow and children, too, in some cases, are gone to rest in the quiet and retired grave,

and their spirits are again with the husband and father in that happy land above. Oh, happy family! none happier in heaven! They need now your aid no more. They have forgiven you. And they are willing to share all heaven with you, and come back and endure all again for you; who would not part with a little earthly comfort for them? O ye dead! ye glorified! who leaned your weary heads upon the bosom of divine Providence, and heard Jesus say, "Mourners dry your tears—a rest remaineth"—ye are rich now, and ye shall never want again. Ye repose now in the pleasant shade of the tree of life, forever removed from the heat and cold of a suffering life. Christ visits you in your mansion, and your frequent and painful separations in the work of the gospel are at an end. You have found a permanent home at last—and such a home!—and you rest from your labors. Your work is done, and Christ pays you for it, as he promised he would—and such a reward!—"glorified together with him." It is enough.

THE END.

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